

EXPONENT II

*And it shall be called
the New Jerusalem,
a land of Peace,
a city of Refuge,
a place of Safety
for the Saints of the
Most High God . . .
and it shall be called
Zion.*

*Doctrine and
Covenants 45:66*

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EXPONENT II

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In Search of a Place of Safety

Sue Paxman
Lexington, Massachusetts

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Most of us spend a great deal of our life, knowingly or unknowingly, seeking people and places that make us feel safe—loved, nurtured, and protected. For those of us who have suffered abuse at the hands of others, the search for safety becomes what we do most.

From Doctrine and Covenants 45:66, we understand that the Zion the early Saints were attempting to build would be "a place of safety." What a wonderful blessing and promise for our foremothers and forefathers and one that they needed desperately to believe in. I would imagine that the emotional and physical threats that they lived under constantly for so many years made them despair that they would ever feel safe.

They thought they had found safety in Ohio, then Illinois, then Utah. Eventually, the attacks from the outside subsided, and they were able to settle peacefully down in their Western homes to a pattern of multiplying and replenishing, safe in their knowledge that their enemies no longer pursued them.

And that is the atmosphere in which I grew up; I felt safe. I lived in a small Utah town where everyone left their front doors unlocked, even at night; no one ever locked a car; everyone had a role to play and seemed to play it without complaint; the status quo was rarely if ever challenged, which contributed to the feeling of safe, ripple-free sailing. In fact, everyone and everything seemed, to my adolescent eyes, to be "just about perfect in every way."

(Of course, I realize now that there was as much going on under this "safe" surface then as there is more openly now. Crimes were being committed; families were in trauma; people were being cruel to each other. But, no one really talked about such things then, certainly not to me; they mostly smiled and kept going. The few troubled souls that I did hear about were summarily dismissed as "kooks.")

I felt safe when I walked alone through the fruit orchards and fields that surrounded my house. I felt safe when I went out on dates. I felt safe at school. I felt safe at church. Without really thinking about it, I assumed that I would continue to feel as safe as I always had. I did, indeed, feel like I lived in "a place of safety."

As I grew older, things began to change. I began noticing that I was feeling less sure of being safe. People began locking their doors. I didn't feel comfortable walking by myself. I no longer assumed that everyone I met was "nice." The place that I called Zion began showing the outward signs of being physically unsafe.

But even more disturbing, I began noticing that even in those places that I had felt spiritually safe I sometimes felt unsafe. It was a shock to discover that too often the structures that are meant to protect us and keep us safe can also protect practices that can make us unsafe; for

example, not all homes are safe havens for all of the family members who live there; not all men who hold the priesthood are safe people to be with; not all of us are comfortable playing roles that others have determined for us; not all practices labeled "Church" make individual souls feel safe.

I don't think that things are really that much different now in either our physical or spiritual worlds, but I do think that because our spiritual sphere is growing so rapidly—changing and progressing as it grows—we are beginning to notice the unsafe places. And we want them to be made safe so that Zion can be accomplished.

Women, who are changing the way they view themselves and their roles and taking more responsibility for their own destinies and for the building of Zion, are discovering that having these new views often makes them feel unsafe. Some women who have raised interesting and important theological questions about the nature of diety and their own places in God's plan have often been made to feel unsafe. Those fearful of change can be cruel in their fear. Some may even use the basic human need for "a place of safety" as a weapon by threatening to take that comfort away.

The way that business, government, and church organizations are run is also changing as these groups begin to reflect the new diversity of the people in them and the changes that they represent. Those directing operations want to remain in charge; those who are doing the operating want to be recognized and play more of a part. As we move through these transitions, however, we must not permit the need for safe places of those who fear change to take precedence over the entitlement of all of the Saints to find safety in Zion, even those Saints who are pushing the hardest for that change. Zion is a place for all of us to dwell, safely.

In my view, the best we can all do is try to see change as progression, and progression as something that we have consecrated ourselves to ensuring will happen. Our reason for being here is to improve—to perfect ourselves and to build "the New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the Most High God."

In the tradition of our pioneer forebears, the authors of the following articles are reporting on their own searches for "a place of safety." Some have found theirs; some have not; some are trying to help others find theirs. ■

Foreigner Among the Saints of God

Name Withheld

Approximately twenty-four years ago, I received my mission call. As a new convert, I was unaware of the prevailing biases against sister missionaries. Although I spoke with three bishops before I found one who encouraged me to pursue a mission call rather than a boyfriend, I wasn't overly disturbed by the negative attitudes. I thought it odd, at times, that some members, especially young men, asked pointedly if there wasn't something seriously wrong with me or that a brother would confide that the mission field wasn't the best place to find a husband. For many, the fact that I was a convert was odd enough, and so I was used to being an anomaly.

As a Mormon novice, I was very unfamiliar with the gospel. I had had only the first missionary discussion in high school before my parents forbade me to associate with Mormons. I didn't realize there were specific lessons designed to explain the gospel to the uninitiated. Hence, my conversion had been largely an individual, spiritual process. It began with a testimony of the Book of Mormon and was nurtured by a few good families who took the time to answer my questions. I recognized I would have little problem associating with Latter-day Saints; I was very much drawn to their sincerity and friendliness. But I also believed that people can be misleading and that I had to accept or reject the gospel for its own sake. So my conversion, while a spiritual process, was also a duration of self-imposed isolation. I had little interaction with the Saints at that time.

After two years of studying and weighing the prospect of parental objections, I was baptized. My parents were shocked and upset. They had warned me that if I chose to become a Mormon, I would need to find another source of financial support for my education. So I transferred to BYU in my junior year, where I could get part-time work to help me through school. In my parent's minds, this was just another example of poor decision making. We went through some rough experiences together.

My testimony, meanwhile, continued to grow, and I learned a great deal about what it meant to be a Mormon. Then I was awakened to the idea of a mission. Somehow the conviction took form beyond my ability and knowledge to generate it. Concentrating on my studies became extremely difficult. I wanted to go on a mission.

Believing that I alone was responsible for financially sustaining my mission, I quit school to work at an airplane factory. Leaving school was traumatic. The children in my family were expected to finish college. My parents made it clear that as far as they were concerned, I had thrown away any chance of making something of myself. Although I had talked about a mission when I first told them my plan to leave school, it was not mentioned again. They were not interested in hearing about the Church, and they were especially not interested in my plans to take religion door-to-door.

The year that I worked for my mission funds was one of deep self-examination. While I knew I wanted to be a missionary, I was not sure Heavenly Father thought me worthy. After all, coming from a traditional Christian background, I believed all missionaries were something special. I needed to know He wanted me as a missionary. Fortunately, I was blessed with wonderful experiences of spiritual confirmation. By the time I sent in my papers, I was firmly committed to the idea that my desires were divinely acknowledged. Whatever specific information about the gospel I lacked, I did know without doubt that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was His Church and that this message had to reach all people.

I was called to a foreign mission, and when I first arrived at the Language Training Mission (LTM) in Provo, there was only one other sister attending that language section. She, however,

left the two days after I arrived. For about three weeks, I had two elders in my district as companions.

This was not a problem for me. The missionaries in my district were young and delightful. They reminded me very much of the boys whom I had coached on a community swim team, except these young men were special because they were missionaries. I only vaguely understood at the time that all nineteen-year-old males were expected to fulfill missions. I did become aware that many of them took the mission experience for granted; some were even there reluctantly. I felt that only a few were as intense in their commitment as I was. Nevertheless, I respected them, and they accepted me. Never before had I experienced such group rapport, such a sense of belonging.

There was, however, a dark side: Evidently my sincerity was not apparent to the mission leaders of my language section. Several times when I was seen talking with an elder—in the halls, a few words during study hours in the evening—I would be called in the next day and interrogated about whether I had any feelings for that particular brother. I was astounded each time that it happened. The mission infrastructure fostered teamwork and a strong sense of group identity, and I had absolutely no inclinations nor intentions to distract the elders or myself from the mission experience. They were great "kids," but I felt very much like their older sister.

Eventually the sisters in our language zone began to compare experiences with lady missionaries from another zone who lived in the same building as we did. These sisters were also being questioned about perceived relationships with specific elders. We thought it funny that no one had accused us of having designs on the teachers or leaders who were obviously closer to our age and interests. One evening, amidst a great deal of laughter and fun, we took stock of the teachers' various emotional, spiritual, and physical attributes.

Unfortunately, one sister felt such discussions inappropriate and reported us. What a deflating experience! We were rebuked, and I felt a compulsion to apologize and to seek forgiveness for our "feminine light-mindedness." I took the reprimands seriously for, after all, I was still new in the Church and often found myself running amok among Mormon mores.

With only a few more weeks to go, the zone leader of our language section saw me talking to my district leader. The classes were just breaking for lunch, and we were walking along with other district members. The zone leader called me into his office. I had a "fly-paper" effect, he said, and it would be his recommendation that I not be allowed to go on a mission.

I was stunned. At first, I didn't grasp what he was saying. He illustrated my "inappropriate behavior" with the example that elders would speak to me as they waited for their turn at the drinking fountain—brazen words such as "Hi," or "How's it going?"—as I studied alone, at a nearby table, so that I could concentrate better. There was, of course, no admission that the elders themselves could have been responsible. I was blamed as a distraction although I never initiated contact; the elders were blameless in spite of the fact that they started the conversation and made it difficult for me to concentrate. The zone leader was hostile and intense in his conviction that I did not belong with the other missionaries. He said that he could no longer allow "his" missionaries' minds to be pre-occupied. Obviously, I was an outsider and did not merit the same protection that he provided for the rest of "his" zone.

As I sat in his office, feelings of humiliation and anguish swept over me. What had I done wrong? What had I said? I couldn't quite believe his resentment or understand what he was saying. Yet, I didn't have the ability to question or challenge him. I literally could not speak. Without thinking, I tore from his office and ran to the only place where I could be alone and could find comfort. I climbed up the

hills adjacent to "Y" Mountain. I spent the rest of the afternoon there. Only as I sat on a rock overlooking the valley did I realize I'd broken a major rule of missionary companionship, but the disobedience no longer seemed to matter.

I felt inexplicably ashamed and degraded. Although I was not aware of the ramifications of my thoughts, I sensed I had somehow been betrayed by my femaleness. The zone leader was incapable of seeing past his perception of my gender to the missionary whom I was committed to be. Apparently, in his mind, I was the prototypical female antagonist, conspiring to corrupt young, innocent, male missionaries. I had been learning that the newly baptized would no longer be "strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the Saints," but I was still a foreigner. My language-section leader was a throwback to St. Augustine who asserted that women are lower than the animals for they are without souls.

These thoughts belong to my present-day understanding. Then I felt only the anguish of inadequacy and failure. I was lost. I was estranged from my family. The Church and its members had become my home; yet, there was no one to whom I could turn for comfort or support. My sense of myself and of my future were all tied to my mission.

Fortunately, I learned one of the most powerful lessons of my life up on that mountain. I discovered that the Lord, not the mission leaders, had called me on my mission. In the midst of despair, thoughts started forming in my mind. They were accompanied by a sense of determination. I knew what I was to do: I was to return to the LTM and to my classes. I was not to report to any leaders or discuss the episode. I was to keep my eyes down, my mouth shut, and do my work as carefully and as quietly as I could, and somehow I would leave for my mission.

I followed the divine instructions exactly. When I returned, my companion and the district leader told me that I was to report to the LTM mission president. I didn't go. Intuitively, I knew there would be trouble, perhaps expulsion, if I reported as instructed. Except for being with my companion, I stayed to myself throughout the remaining days. To the last minute, I was in doubt as to whether I would be allowed to leave with the rest of my district. It was a nightmare. I felt that at any time I would be told to pack my bags and go home. Thankfully, the long weeks came to an end, and I was allowed to leave the LTM along with other district members.

I fulfilled an honorable mission. Additionally, I gained the love and respect of a marvelous mission president. He was tough and demanding, and I was committed to the work that I was called to do. He helped restore my faith in myself as well as my faith in the men in the Church. We remain close friends even today. He and his wife exemplify all that is good in Church leadership, in contrast to the LTM zone leader and others of his ilk.

This story of anti-female prejudice is mild compared to those that involve serious sexual harassment and abuse; however, that it occurred in the Church, specifically in the mission field, is a sad indicator of male attitudes. Even today, a common topic among returned male missionaries is either the superlative efforts of some lady missionaries or the ineptitude and inadequacies of others. Rarely are we perceived as "fellowcitizens" of the missionary work force.

Since my mission, I have encouraged young women to go. My experience in the field afforded greater spiritual and mental growth than even I anticipated. I will be forever grateful. I am especially thankful to my Heavenly Father for granting me the mission experience and for guiding me past those who were too blinded by their own prejudice to understand my willingness and worthiness to serve. ■

The Interview

Risa Taylor
Los Angeles, California

The call came at 7:23 A.M. At that time of morning, I expected the caller to bestow simple news. Maybe a flash flood had leveled our neighborhood during the night or a tornado had rampaged through the western United States. But this was not a simple call.

"Hello, Sister Taylor," the innocuous-sounding voice said. The caller sounded not only innocuous, but downright chirpy. Nauseatingly so, at 7:23 in the morning.

The over-friendliness set me on edge, and I prepared for the worst. The chirpy voice belonged to the first counselor in the bishopric.

Calls from my bishopric are never good. They are either calls to repentance ("We've noticed your temple recommend has lapsed."), calls to a new calling ("We'd like you to serve as the new nursery leader."), or calls to discuss a problem ("Sister Wilson has complained that your son tap dances on the table during his primary class."). So when I heard the bishopric voice on the other end of the line, panic set in.

"Sister Taylor," he continued, still revoltingly cheerful, "we'd like you and your husband to come to the church tonight for a chat. Can you be there at 8:15?"

Even as I thought, "Hell, no! I've got to put three kids in bed by 7:30," I said—trying to equal his chirpiness, "Sure, we'll be there." It wasn't lack of assertiveness that made me say "Yes." I just wanted to get the dreaded visit over. I knew there was no hope in getting out of the interview. I knew I'd live in fear until it was over, so I made the appointment.

As soon as I hung up, I began surveying the possibilities, and they were frightening. What could he have in mind? First, the obvious . . . a new calling. I already had two: ward choir director and, with my husband, single adult advisor. I enjoyed my callings. I'd just finished a stint in the Primary presidency so the ward choir and single adults were a snap.

Perhaps the Primary wanted me back. Impossible. I'd failed dismally there. Even with three kids of my own, I'd never been comfortable with the

Primary children. They scared me to death. Surely the Primary would never entrust children to me again.

Maybe it was a call to repentance. This remained a distinct possibility. I had many reasons to repent, everything from skipped tithing settlement to bad-mouthing the bishopric. And my temple recommend had expired . . . two years ago. It was hard to decide exactly which sin they would pinpoint from my endless list.

Then it hit me. I knew what he wanted. I was going to be reprimanded for my liberal views. I subscribe to *Sunstone*, the Mormon Women's Forum newsletter, and *Exponent II*. After the latest flap about the Sunstone Symposium, I reasoned that the Church had gotten hold of all the mailing lists, had checked out where the subscribers lived, and sent the names of the evil-doers to their appointed bishops. It was my turn to be chastised for reading those alternate voices.

With clarity of purpose, I planned my speech to the counselor. I would defend my choices, with intelligence and passion. I would shout from the rooftops that it was okay to be a liberal Mormon. I would resolutely declare my right to read whatever I chose and would recite the entire Constitution and Bill of Rights. I was prepared.

With butterflies in my stomach, my husband and I drove to the church that night. Brother Crawford was there, waiting, with a smile on his face and the ward list in his hand. He ushered us into the bishop's office and said in a hushed, spiritual tone of voice, "Let's start with a word of prayer." I knew something bad was coming if we had to start with a word of prayer.

After the word of prayer, we chit-chatted for a few minutes. Mindless, small talk. Ahems and edgy pauses. Crawford was clearly killing time. Finally, he said with a mean-spirited grin on his face, "Well, I guess you'd like to know why I called you here tonight."

We took the bait and assured him that we did indeed. I heard a drum roll in my head as he took a deep breath and said, "We'd like to release you from your callings as Single Adult advisors."

What? A simple release from a calling?

That was all? What a letdown. No rebuke. No opportunity for me to pontificate about freedom of choice. No chance to recite the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

To make matters worse, he assured us that we were valuable members of the ward and that we were only being released because we each had two callings and the bishopric, knowing we had three small children, wanted to make our lives easier. We were happy to be released, and it all made sense. Damn it.

On the way home, we laughed about my pre-interview fear and trembling and wondered why the prospect of a bishopric interview unnerved me more than speaking in stake conference, firing incompetent employees, or even teaching a Blazer class. Why had this syrupy first counselor, ten years younger than I, put me on the defensive?

Authority. Power. Brother Crawford clearly had the edge. He was male, bestowed with authority, cloaked in the priesthood and bishopric callings. Years of bishopric interviews had provided fodder for my ideas of an all-powerful bishopric and a subservient interviewee.

I remembered, as a non-dating, lumpy 16-year-old, being asked if I were morally clean, and my flippant response, "I'd like the opportunity to test my moral cleanliness." I remembered premarital interviews and being asked intensely personal embarrassing questions. I remembered, as a newlywed, deliberately seeking a bishop who would not ask whether I used birth control.

I thought I'd matured enough to not be bothered by such interviews, but apparently they still cast their spell. Perhaps they always will. Authority and power are hard to kick against.

I'm confident I'll learn to rely on my inner strength and some day be able to go to a bishop's interview without butterflies. ~~Maybe I'll still get my chance to expound on my ideals of choice and accountability. After all, I didn't memorize the Constitution and the Bill of Rights for nothing.~~ ■

My Favorite Interview

Jenny Atkinson
Cambridge, Massachusetts



I said. When I was finished, I waited to hear the real reason that he had come to speak with me.

After a moment, he sat back and quietly said, "Jenny, last week, when I was driving home from work, I received the distinct impression that Heavenly Father loves you and is proud of you for what you have chosen to do with your life. I just wanted to tell you that."

I couldn't believe that he'd made an appointment and come to my home just because he'd had an impression about me. He could have forgotten—he surely had plenty of other things on his mind. He could have said, "You're doing a great job, Jenny," when he saw me in church. He could have waited until I came to him with a concern. Yet, because he acted on his impression in such a serious way, I was able to feel the relief and happiness that I'd been looking for.

Heavenly Father gave the answer to my prayer to my bishop. I was grateful to him for being the kind leader who saw his role not so much as a judge but more importantly as someone who simply provided support and encouragement to the members of our ward. ■

Recently I was chatting with a friend who was waiting to meet with our bishop. He said, "The bishop asked me if I could meet him at 2:10. Ever since, I've been wondering why he wants to talk to me." His words reminded me of a time a few years ago when I'd had the same question. My bishop at the time had phoned me to set up an interview. I'd recently received a new Church calling, so I couldn't imagine that he wanted to talk about that. I hadn't been involved in any great wickedness. I had missed Church a couple of times recently. "Had he noticed . . . and could that merit his calling me in?" I wondered.

At the same time, though, I had been wondering about what I wanted to do with my life, if the profession that I had been training for was a good choice. I didn't know whether I was spending my time in the way that was most wise. As I asked Heavenly Father for guidance, I didn't feel as if I was receiving any immediate answers. I was not satisfied, but I figured that I could handle things on my own just fine, like I always had before.

My bishop met me in my home and asked how I was doing. I told him how tired and frustrated I was,

teaching children who I felt needed a lot more support, love, and caring than I could ever give them. I wondered what the point of it all was. I also told him that in most ways I was very happy—I had good friends, support from my family; in most ways, I loved what I was doing and learning. He listened attentively to everything that

By Virtue of Authority: A Bishop's Perspective

Scott Fisher
Ann Arbor, Michigan

I am a "lifer" in the Church, have filled a mission, and feel that I am a devoted member. I hope that my efforts will add and not detract from the primary purposes of the Church (Mosiah 18), which are to carry each others' burdens that they may be light, to mourn with those who mourn that they will be comforted, and to take upon us the name of God.

My experiences as a bishop, as a psychologist, and as a father of four who have now left adolescence are helping me to get closer to the issue of Church interviews. I am in troubled by the circumstances that lead to damaging interactions between youth and Church leaders, instead of the helpful and growth-producing interactions that should occur.

"We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion." So the odds aren't great. Given the odds—almost all men—the Church is doing a miraculous job with lay clergy who lack professional training and have a diversity of backgrounds. I hope that everyone, especially the leadership, is working to make it better. But there is a fundamental problem in putting adult male authority figures in a position where they are expected by "virtue" of the strength of their position to exercise "righteous" influence when "righteous" influence can so easily become coercive.

My points are simple. I think that we should have interviews that are oriented toward *supportiveness* instead of *worthiness*; that women should meet with women and men with men, especially young women and young men; and that women sharing in the priesthood would be the best step toward safeguarding young women and promoting the growth and development of all Church members.

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First about interviews.

The act of assessing worthiness is, I believe, an act of domination. Because the judging process usually kills the relationship and the authority (or influence) of the person exercising the authority, I don't think we should be doing the judging.

As a bishop, I felt it was the responsibility of Church members to decide their worthiness, not mine. The injunction for a bishop to be a judge in Israel originally had to do with equity in temporal living, not with spiritual worthiness, and I think we are burdening everyone with our current interpretation. So, I minimized my job. I don't remember ever turning anyone down, but I do remember encouraging a few people to be less hard on themselves and to take the Savior's gift of forgiveness seriously.

I think that the way the temple recommendation interviews are being administered is a problem and sets a bad precedent for interviews generally. As presently outlined, the interview is an invasion of privacy in the lives of Saints, all of whom have the responsibility of governing themselves. We don't ask similar temple-qualifying questions of belief and behavior to the teachers of the CTR Bs or the Sunbeams. Who is most at risk? The dead? The walls and accoutrements of the dedicated buildings? Or impressionable lives who, if injured, can bring millstones down around their own necks?

As a bishop, I enjoyed talking to young people—when they wanted to talk. I found that they didn't often want to talk. And why should they? The last thing normal teenagers want to do is to talk with an adult about anything, especially their experiences with sex, the most intimate and private part of their lives. How can we men be so arrogant as to believe that young people would want to share their intimate concerns or burdens with us? I did not feel that I had the right to ask about the intimate aspects of their personal lives, boys or girls, but especially girls. I believe that men should not initiate conversations of a sexual nature, directly or implied, with young women.

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When I interviewed young women for any purpose, I tried to make it possible for them to stay in charge of the interview, or at least in charge of what they said in the interview. I would ask something like, "How are things?" or "How would you like to use this time that we have?" Occasionally, I asked how things were with their boyfriends or "love life" when I knew it would be heard as a general question of interest about them, not as an invasion of privacy.

I don't want to present myself as a paragon of sensitivity and interviewing skills. I had one of my worst experiences as a bishop when I violated my own rules. I had received second-hand information about a young woman and felt it was my "duty" to act. Luckily, she was strong. She denied the accusation (later information indicated that she was telling the truth) and called me a jerk for insisting that my information was better than her own. She moved away before I had the courage and/or insight to make reconciliation. So now there is a young woman somewhere in the Church who has had first-hand experience with the nature of "almost all men" and who doubtlessly still thinks I am a jerk. I don't think she was hurt by the experience, and I am grateful for that. It hurt me. I earned the disrespect of her family, deservedly, and had to live with the humiliation of my mistake. I will probably never make one like it again. And who knows, she may eventually gain wisdom enough to forgive an adult who behaved stupidly. I have never felt that good intentions made up for mistakes. I still feel badly about that one, but I am wiser.

As men, we quite naturally don't see through the eyes of women. It might help us to understand what it is like for women when men ask questions of an intimate nature if we would put the shoe on the other foot. Consider how we would feel if the Primary president or one of her counselors interviewed all boys for the priesthood with the expectation (real or implied) that she inquire into the sexual behavior of each boy. When adults, including parents, talk about sex or anything intimate with their opposite-sex children it is almost always seductive and damaging to the child. Why don't we see this?

There is a further complication for men because young women can appear to be flirtatious with older men whom they may genuinely like and admire. Don't blame the victim. This normal behavior is a hazard that is exacerbated by the overwhelmingly unbalanced power of an older man with the substantial mantle of bishop, counselor, or stake president. Bishops and counselors can be vulnerable to attention or admiration that can sometimes seem provocative. Knowing how to respond without exploiting the situation is a problem even for professionally trained Ph.D.-level clinicians from time to time. We are arrogant to think that because a man holds the priesthood he can enter people's lives and flirt with

dangers where angels might not tread. The institution needs to provide the best possible safeguards. I don't think we are providing them.

The best—and I think most obvious—safeguard would be to have women talking with women and vice versa. There is no guarantee that women will not abuse the authority role, but experience suggests that women tend to be less coercive. Even if a woman is domineering, there will be fewer problems if the genders of the dominator and "dominee" are the same.

If we need more metaphors to help us to see the significance of male-dominated interviewing, consider how different the experience of a pelvic exam is for a woman when the attending physician is female, instead of male. Then consider which is more private: our physical bodies or our hearts and souls?

Solomon said, "Above all else guard your heart for it is the well-spring of life." (Proverbs 4:23) The interview relationship would be significantly altered if conducted by a same-sex adult, and the young person would be less at risk and less likely to be overpowered. Of that I am sure.

We have some serious problems involving Church administration that are affecting the lives of our young people. It so happens that these problems overlap with this practice of withholding priesthood from women. I think we need to improve the way in which we conduct interviews. We need to look again at the notions of worthiness and for what purposes we conduct interviews. We need to focus on helpfulness, respect for privacy, and individual responsibility for all age groups. We need to provide our young people with full-statured leaders of both sexes after whom they can pattern their lives.

So on to the heart of my solution.

When young women feel a need to disclose mistakes as a step in returning to the right way, is it important that their adult leader have the authority to "act in God's name," or is it enough to have an understanding heart? Is the inspiration that auxiliary leaders are blessed with as part of their stewardship enough—considering that these leaders are, on a day-to-day basis, closer to the young women and more informed about their lives? Can women counsel without priesthood authority? Perhaps—if we tell the young women that talking with their young women leaders is appropriate and adequate and that their leaders can speak for the Church as well as the bishop.

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The Doctrine and Covenants is filled with instructions about priesthood authority. Every office in the Church carries instruction as to the authority needed to function in that office. Women cannot be bishops, counselors, or stake presidents without the priesthood unless there is a new revelation to change all of these instructions. But there is every indication that the limitation on use of priesthood authority is a practice that can be changed without requiring additional revelation.

I recall Eldon Tanner saying that he was aware of no scripture, ancient or modern, to

(Continued on page 7)

Abuse of Authority in the Ecclesiastical Interview

Name Withheld

It all started when the first counselor kissed me, but I think the feelings of self-blame, of sexuality gone awry, went back further than that. When I was eleven, I had a crush on an older man who was adored by over half the girls in my seventh-grade class. We were together daily because of responsibilities I had at the school where he worked. He loved to tease and to make me blush. It was easy. I was naive, serious, shy, and had no idea what to make of the pleasurable embarrassment his attentions aroused. He grew bolder as time went on. I would literally bend over backwards—in his arms, of course—to escape his teasing kiss. On one occasion, after picking me up to babysit, he explained that his wife had already left for her meeting but that he needed me there to take care of the children so that he could work. Instead of going upstairs to his study, he sat on a chair in the living room, where the baby and I were playing, and watched. There was something not nice about this, but I didn't know what.

By the third year of this bewildering association, I felt trapped in a game that had gone beyond my understanding or control. When I could not avoid him, I grew more forceful about saying "no." He was angry and, I suppose, hurt by my inexplicable change of heart. He gave me detention, and I was stuck for forty-five minutes alone with him for several days after school. I appealed to my mother, who didn't believe me at first, but who did go to the school guidance counselor in an attempt to get my schedule changed. The story came out; the counselor accused me of fantasizing and recommended professional help. "Why would an intelligent, mature, married man with years of experience with young people, have even the remotest sexual interest in a pimply-faced, thirteen-year-old kid?"

Good question. I didn't understand it myself.

The rules of the game are: girls *always* get crushes on older men—movie stars, leaders, teachers, coaches. They may act silly and shy and ingenuously smitten. But men old enough to be fathers should be fatherly; they are not supposed to do anything back.

I knew, therefore, that there was something wrong with me when, in high school, it happened again.

We all thought that the bishop's counselor in charge of Mutual was, in the words of the sixties, "neat"—nice-looking and fun to be around. I was thrilled whenever he turned his dimpled smile on me. I don't remember the interview: Was it something in my eyes? Was it the way I smiled? Was it the dress I was wearing? But afterwards, as previously arranged with my parents, he drove me home. Or rather, he *didn't* drive me home. We passed the turn to our house, continued for some time on the highway, then he pulled over to the side of a gravel road and stopped the car. When he leaned towards me, my mind said, "Open the door and get out," but my body went limp, and I slid off the front passenger seat onto the floor.

If he had touched me at that point, I probably would have gone to the nearest farmhouse for help. At the very least, I would have told my parents about the incident as soon as I got home. But he was smarter than that. He acted as though he just wanted to talk for a few minutes, and, of course, I could see nothing wrong with that.

These private talks went on for several weeks before he touched me, several more months before he kissed me. My journal at the time was full of self-hatred and guilt. At sixteen, I was mentally and physically mature for my age. I knew better than to "make out" with a married man, especially one who had been to the temple. He told me—and later my parents—that he wanted to marry me. But I didn't want to marry him. How could he betray his wife and children? And how could I disappoint my parents who trusted me so? I told myself I would not see him

again, but it was very hard to stop. He followed me everywhere: as I walked to and from school; in the school halls and on field trips; at church where, of course, I couldn't avoid seeing him.

Eventually, he was disfellowshipped, and he moved his family to another state. My parents were incensed when they learned that this wasn't the first time he had had "moral problems." At the very least, they requested the following comment be put on his permanent Church record: "Should not work with young people." It's my understanding that no action was taken. I, on the other hand, was sentenced to months of counseling with a member of the stake presidency.

I'm not sure how this bargain was struck—why I was assumed to need counseling when he got off with a reproof, and why, if counseling was necessary, I wasn't sent to a professional instead of Brother H—, whom I distrusted. At any rate, I was delivered to his office once a month, where he would sit and stare, first at me, and then, tiring of that, out the dusty window of his office waiting for who knows what? I didn't want to talk about it, especially not to him. He seemed to regard me as an Interesting Case. His questions—"What did I do when he...? What attracted me to...? How did I feel about my...?"—struck me as unnaturally voyeuristic. He had already been briefed, as far as I could tell, on the extent of my degradations. What did he want me to say? What was he waiting to hear? Was he going to grant absolution in exchange for all the dirty details?

I wanted to feel clean, but no matter what the Church taught about confession being good for the soul, I could not confide in that man. I felt stripped of my dignity. His probing questions penetrated my privacy and left me with no protective reserve.

So I waited. I waited until my sophomore year at BYU, when I had a bishop who didn't let a hint of his personal feelings get in the way. He was tall, dark, and handsome, but his interest in and awareness of me was straightforward and professional. During our interviews, he was first and foremost a "bishop" and only incidentally a "man." After a series of tentative half-confessions (I was worried that he might think less of me), I was finally able to begin the process of forgiving myself for what seemed to me at the time, serious sexual sins.

At BYU in the early seventies, nearly all nonmarital sex qualified as "serious sin." Necking and petting, according to a popular new book by one of the apostles, not only led to "other ugly sins such as pregnancy" (!), but were "in and of themselves...pernicious evils." Masturbation, for instance, was enough to keep a young man from serving a mission. More than one returned missionary has confided in me that he expected to be sent home from his mission, maybe even excommunicated, for not being able to control what was known then as the "solitary vice."

BYU students were told over and over again, in firesides, in assemblies, in sacrament meetings, that confession of "major sins"—major meaning "adultery, fornication, other sexual transgression, and other sins of comparable seriousness"—was necessary for full forgiveness. And anyone who tried to convince herself otherwise—"I don't need to talk to the bishop; I've already confessed to the Lord"—would face humiliating exposure on Judgement Day.

In those days, my friends and I weren't exactly sure what was meant by "other sins of comparable seriousness." We decided that if it felt good and you felt guilty about it, it was serious. Those of us with consciences confessed as often as we sinned, which—considering the range of possibilities—must have kept BYU bishops busy around the clock.

In my four years at BYU, I was interviewed by several bishops—all of them hard-working, well-meaning, and kind. Nevertheless, I felt at a disadvantage from the moment we shook hands. I was female; I was young; I lacked authority. How I was judged depended on my ability to communicate my situation honestly and clearly; yet, there were many times when I

could hardly get the words out of my mouth. It was mortifying to share intimate details of my life—things I wouldn't even tell a girlfriend or my mother—with a man I hardly knew.

Looking back on it, I have to laugh at some of the things I thought were sins. But we did not talk openly about women's sexuality in those days, even among ourselves. Childbirth and related functions were discussed in great detail, but words like *orgasm*, *masturbation*, *erectile* were not considered part of the female vocabulary or experience. We needed the example and guidance of older women, but there were no female adult leaders in the student wards. Not one. Our only role models were the wives of bishops, stake presidents, and their counselors, who often attended off-campus wards for the benefit of their children. Three of my professors (in my over four years of college) were women; even so, they would not have been commissioned to counsel or to judge.

Not all interviews involved counseling, of course. There were the "extend-a-calling" interviews and the "getting-to-know-you" chats. But even those with a relatively neutral content could be anxiety-producing. Some authorities treated me like a person, but others came across as male presiding over female. This is, of course, a subjective judgment and may have as much—if not more—to do with me than with the interviewer, but at any rate, in some of the interview situations, I knew seconds after walking in that I did not want to be alone with this particular man behind a closed door. My hands got cold and clammy; sexual awareness, like condensation, hung heavily between us in the air.

I am not suggesting that these men had anything but the best intentions. But I was uncomfortable. And I sensed that *they* were uncomfortable, too. Not socially uncomfortable—I could deal with that—but *uneasy at being alone with me simply because I was female*. They didn't seem to know how to relate to women who weren't their girlfriends or wives.

On one occasion, when I was trying to make some difficult decisions about marriage, I discovered that the bishop and my fiancé were contemporaries. As I told my story, between tears, it was clear by the comments he made, that the bishop was enjoying himself. When I finished, he threw back his head and slapped his thigh. "I can't believe you!" he laughed.

I was hurt and confused. He didn't take me seriously and, what's more, identified with his male colleague. Instead of challenging him, I backed into a "silly young thing" role, uncomfortably conscious of the temptations of my sex.

All things considered, I admired and liked this bishop (think of the innumerable stories he must have listened to, all without smiling, before he burst into laughter at mine), but I never went back to him for "fatherly" advice.

Six months later, this same bishop refused to sign my missionary application on the grounds that I would "be too distracting for the elders." Once again, I was hurt. In context, "distracting" had a sexual connotation. What did he think I was going to do—stand on a street corner in a tight dress and seduce people into listening to my door approach? What right did he have to evaluate my sexuality and my self-control?

When I told this story to a male friend, he said, "You know, he probably meant it as a compliment." You've got to be kidding.

But when I repeated the story to my husband, he said, "I can see how you might find that offensive, but he was probably just trying to protect you from what might have been a miserable missionary experience—guys following you all over the place all the time. We had two attractive women in our mission, and the zone leaders arranged to work with them as much as they could."

Positive interpretations (if you can call them that) that would *never* have occurred to me. Nor would they, I think, to most women. Men and women have amazingly different interpretations of the same events, especially when it comes to sex.

What was the first counselor thinking when he set out to seduce me? Did he think he was giving me what I wanted, or was he only out for himself? Did he realize I was too young to know what he was after, or was he assuming that I had the experience of his peers?

I'm sure there must have been some kind of unspoken communication going on between us and that when he interpreted my desire for attention, he was partly right. And yet, when he kissed me, he crossed my moral line. Whatever sense of morality he had—and I think he had one—it was not the same as mine.

In the fifteen years since college, I've experienced what is probably the usual gamut of sexual encounters with the "man on the street"—grossly offensive to me, yet no big deal to them: the previously convicted child molester who put his hand between my legs when I got too close to his car; the boss who grabbed my legs whenever I got too close to his desk; the dirty pictures surreptitiously taped to my work station; the whistles and catcalls of factory workers; a hand stroking my bottom when I bent over the file cabinets; the obstetrician who, cupping my breast in his hand, joked casually that my husband "must really enjoy that." Offensive, yes. But less personal and, therefore, less damaging, than relationships with Mormon men who have been taught to relate to women in a demeaning way—as "temptations," to be controlled, for instance—rather than as equals.

As I've talked with people about bishop's interviews, in preparation for this article, the most common reaction is: "There should be a rule..." as in, "There should be a rule that men can't bring up the subject of sex." "There should be a rule that women under forty (why forty?) can't be alone with men (of any age)." "There should be a rule about leaving the door open, no handshakes or hugs allowed."

My question for the rulemakers is: When are we going to grow up?

When will we learn that morality isn't obedience to a list of rules, but behavior that flows naturally from righteous desires? When will we learn to relate to each other as equals, not as temptations but as friends? When will we learn to take responsibility for and joy in our sexuality? When will we learn that there is something wrong with a system that sets men over women and gives one man authority to judge the "worthiness" of another?

As long as temple recommend interviews (and temple recommends) are deemed necessary, I would like to see them limited to two questions: "Do you feel worthy to go to the temple?" and "Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"

If a Church leader feels, for some reason, that it's important to go over each question, he could say, "I'm going to read through the list now, slowly; please stop me if you have comments about any of these." This approach assumes that I am an adult (in spite of being a woman) and although I may have some problems, my choices are directed by an inner sense of morality, not compelled by a closed set of rules.

I see the value of private, confessional counseling in the Church. But I also believe that the interview process, as it now stands, infantilizes women more so than men. A system that gives one group of people authority over another by virtue of gender is set up for abuse. Abuse will continue unless there is change. And until there is change—not in superficial rules—but in the system that perpetuates abuse, I'll continue to opt out of the interview network. Given my experience, a bishop's interview is like stepping into a fire—and fire is not good for healing burns. ■

By Virtue of Authority: A Bishop's Perspective

(Continued from page 5.)

appear to be contradicting the scriptures by maintaining the distinction. "All are alike unto God, male and female..." (2 Nephi 26:33) Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants included, as one of the purposes of the Restoration, "that all men (people) might speak in the name of God." I do not believe that the Lord intended that phrase to be exclusive of women.

I can't think of an argument against giving women the priesthood that I haven't used or believed at some point in my life. None of them makes sense to me any more, and I feel at peace on the matter for the first time. I am no longer comfortable with our practice of withholding the priesthood from women. I certainly can't find any such justification in inspiration, logic, or scripture. This is a recent position shift for me, and I credit writing this article for crystallizing my views on the issue.

I think that what we are presently doing

*"All are alike
unto God,
male and female..."
2 Nephi 26:33*

by withholding the priesthood has more to do with domination, however benevolent and unintended, than it does with contributing to the spiritual growth of women. I can't think of a better way to limit the tremendous power created by our worship of priesthood authority and the bishop as a "super person" than to give each bishop one or two women for counselors—unless of course, it would be to have a woman as bishop. To say that bishops have lots of women "counselors" already is only being cute and begs the question.

During my tenure as bishop, I attempted to call a woman as a counselor, or assistant, to meet with the bishopric, but the proposal met with such hostility from a few but very vocal women that I abandoned the idea. Why there was so much objection was never clear to me, but it felt like jealousy. Is it possible that jealousy is another consequence of women being left out of important administrative roles?

The advantages of women holding the priesthood are numerous. To have a woman with the priesthood in an authority position would be saying important things to our women, young and old. We would be showing them that they are equally valued in the sight of God and equally trusted with His stewardship, a message that is unavoidably lost with the "follow the priesthood" phrase popular with many leaders, women as well as men.

*The priesthood issue
is not about roles.*

There are a few abuses on the other side—which may have arisen, in part, to make up to women what we take away or withhold—that might also go away if women had authority. We have too many women being the principal role models for boys from early years to adolescence. Mothers, not the fathers, are responsible for and recognized for the the Eagle award during the initiation rites. The absurdity of the practice, romanticizing the role of the mother, should be evident to everyone. To say it is because the mother has more time is ridiculous. We just haven't thought about it, and I hope we will.

I believe that one reason the leadership is reluctant to put women on an equal plane in this regard is because of an unintelligible distinction in male and female roles that many of us, leaders and members alike, are trying to perpetuate. All this attention to "appropriate male and female roles" appears to me to be, at least in part, a reflection of discomfort with our own masculinity.

The priesthood issue is not about roles. It is about growth, shared influence, full access to all resources, appropriate influence in leadership—and interviewing. Can we do these things best with or without women sharing in the full rights and responsibilities?

When our first parents were thrown out of the Garden, the commentator observed that enmity was placed between the woman and the man (not the serpent, unless man was the serpent, which makes a rather interesting joke if you are a man and don't take yourself too seriously). I believe that rendering. What point is there to literalism in this passage? The snake can strike her heel, but can she step on it? What would be the point of such a trivial idea?

Enmity between the man and the woman has been there throughout recorded history. According to the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, it will be necessary for men to become feminine and women to become masculine (i.e. develop the characteristics found in greater measure in each other) to be able to make a place in His kingdom. We are making progress in this direction. Androgyny is an accepted idea in many places. We fight it in the Church, but we have it more solidly in the gospel than in science, I think. For instance, every leadership characteristic mentioned in Section 121 would be recognized as feminine in today's notions of the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

During my bishop years, I was struck with how sensitively women prayed when offering public prayers; so, we jumped the gun and asked women to pray in sacrament meetings before the policy changed. Everyone could tell that the more open and warm expressions of the women added a great deal. Women have contributions to make to Church administration that we can't even imagine at this time.

I pray for and will welcome the day when we are all working together in the administration of the Church. I hope I live long enough because this Church, already wonderful in many ways, will be a heavenly place indeed. Maybe that day will be the ending of the war that ushers in the millennium. I think that we will not have that harmony on the earth until we fully recognize women as equals and that we will not have the fullness of life that is available to us in our religious lives until we have joined fully. That day will be the day when we will truly be able to bear each other's burdens and to mourn with those that mourn, and we will be testaments to God and the image of God that is in us. We need each other.

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Unequal Power and the Sexual Domination of Women

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As women, we are socialized in countless ways from earliest infancy for the passive, subordinate roles that we are all taught we must accept in adulthood, particularly as faithful members of the Church. It is not just a matter of learning to serve others because all Church members are encouraged to serve. Instead, the most destructive part of the socialization of girls and women involves a relinquishing of agency, a denial of personhood or autonomy. It is the abnegation of the right that each of us has as a human being to know and understand our own needs and to act in our own behalf to meet those needs if we choose to do so. (Parenthetically, I would add that it is a far different matter to serve from a position of power and authority, as men frequently do, than it is to do so from an already subordinate position, often with little choice or acknowledgement, as women frequently do.)

This view in no way implies that we always put our own needs ahead of those of another person. The key factor here is choice. We may, at times, choose to put another's needs first. On another occasion, we may choose to assert our own. Yet as adult women, the full exercise of free agency is not available to us. We are totally excluded from the highest governing organizations of the Church. We may have input in local organizations, but final decisions are made by men, often in private. As women, we must always monitor whether we are being too assertive or too outspoken, lest, among other consequences, we be relieved of our callings. We may receive benefits from the power to govern, to administer, to heal. It is not, however, ours to use or to control. Our limited access to power represents, at the most basic level, a loss of our agency.

In a hierarchical relationship such as that which has existed between men and women, it is inevitable that the dominant figure become the actor, the agent, the narrator, the subject. The subordinate figure becomes the acted-upon, the object. The notion of man as "Subject" and woman as "Other"—i.e. object—was originally and most eloquently discussed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. In its most malignant form, it implies that woman as an object is a thing, not even human.

Woman's objectification is rampant in our culture in subtle, hardly discernible ways. We are all aware of the beautiful woman perched on the hood of a car who is in some undefinable way supposed to entice us to buy the car. In movies, women are depicted overwhelmingly as objects—someone or something that is acted upon. We are loved, hated, protected, fought over, pursued, raped, or killed, but almost never the "heroes." Until very recently, we seldom took action to protect ourselves. Even now, we are rarely privy to the "inner" struggles, conflicts, or decision making that we face in our daily living. The same is, of course, true in the scriptures. Only in rare instances do they show women's inner struggles or anguished prayers. Similarly in art, history, language, and law, the world is shown to us through men's eyes. Even in mothering, our one exclusive dominion, we are defined through what is best for the needs of the child. Woman is an object, a functionary, defined always in relation to someone else—a man, a child—whose needs must be served.

Nowhere is women's objectification more complete than in the sexual arena. We are all more or less aware and hopefully have, at some point, allowed ourselves to experience sexuality as a powerful driving force. It is through sexual expression that we achieve some of our deepest connections with another human being. It should at the same time be a cherished affirmation of our own individual existence. In fact, one of the elements that makes sexual expression so powerful is that at its best it can simultaneously provide both deep interpersonal connection and powerful self-affirmation. If either of these foci are lost for either partner, the sexual experience itself loses meaning and becomes a self-serving gratification for one or the other. The objectification of women has ensured that all too frequently the man's individual needs are met and the woman's, in trying to maintain the interpersonal connection, are lost.

Once again, man in his dominant role has defined sexuality in terms of his own needs with little regard for and limited understanding of woman's needs. Man is almost universally the pursuer, the aggressor. We can all cite cases to the contrary as we witness teenage girls vigorously pursuing teenage boys. Their motivation, however, has far more to do with needs for attachment and security even if they choose to interact sexually. Our sexuality is, therefore, defined in relation to men, not only in men's minds but in our own as well. Thus, we define ourselves as existing to please them although our motivation may be, once again, to maintain the relationship. Out of necessity, we may seek to modify, placate, or, in the worst situations, escape male sexual aggression. Even as seductresses—who, according to scripture account for a good portion of the world's ills—we still do not define our authentic sexual needs. As a seductress, a woman has only attempted to reverse the power relationship between men and women. Woman's authentic sexual desires and needs, apart from those of maintaining and cherishing relationships, have until very recently been largely undefined. In hierarchical, dominant-submissive relationships, lacking in mutual and honest exchange, reciprocity, and feedback, those needs will tragically remain unfulfilled.

In recent years, two highly publicized cases of sexual harassment and date rape have outlined in bold relief many of the issues in the sexual relationships between men and women. In both, the all-too-familiar Thomas hearings and the Kennedy trial, the man was in a vastly more powerful position. I wouldn't presume to comment on the truthfulness of the testimonies of any of the parties involved. I also believe that both the hearings and the trial were far more a display of political posturing and the adversarial legal system than a concern for truth. The point that I want to make is that both women were not believed by many because they didn't take enough action in their own defense. It was hard for people to believe, for example, that Professor Hill stayed silent for many years about the treatment that she claimed to have received from Judge Thomas. The alleged rape victim in the Kennedy trial was not believed, in part, because there was insufficient evidence that she had struggled to protect herself. Persons knowledgeable in the field understand that this is very typical behavior for victims of sexual assault and rape. They realize, perhaps as the general public does not, that this is how women are raised to be. In order to "fit" our subservient role in society we are socialized to be passive, to respect and idealize (male) authority, to not act to protect ourselves, to depend on others (men) for protection, to not "hurt" people's feelings, to maintain the relationship at all costs. It is impossible for us to behave this way in virtually all other areas of our lives and then suddenly, in the sexual arena, become assertive, self-protective, and autonomous.

The other factor that became glaringly obvious, particularly in the Thomas hearings, was that males, as represented by the nearly all-male Senate, have very limited understanding of how they come across to women sexually. Men's and women's views of sexuality have far less in common than either have imagined. This idea does not imply that women are "prudes" or "no fun." It does indicate, however, that there is a lack of understanding of women's sexual needs. Because our view of human sexuality has until recent years been authored by males, we have been largely unaware of the discrepancies and the dissatisfactions that women feel. The virtually total control that men have exercised in this area would certainly be one of the major points of disagreement. Because women historically have been silent, there has been no way for men to make corrections in their course if they should wish to do so.

Within the Church, there are very strict guidelines as to appropriate sexual behavior between men and women. Yet, we are all aware that lapses occur. It is true that much is made of protecting women's virtue, and this point is conveyed to men, probably *ad nauseam*. What is becoming obvious, however, is that women within the Church, as elsewhere, are still being sexually assaulted in a variety of ways of which men may not be aware. Because we are in a subordinate position in the Church, our opinions are not sought. A woman's point of view is

not highly regarded in any area including sexual. Men do not feel the need for feedback from women, and women are hesitant to give it, so the behaviors continue as an acceptable, even inspired, use of men's authority over women.

In the worst possible situations, the abuse takes the form of acquaintance rape or even incest. In many cases, this abuse is never discussed with anyone, and silent victims struggle with the notion of "respect" that is due male authority figures. If the circumstances do become public, the perpetrator may be brought back into the Church with little restitution made to the victim and little understanding of the years of pain that will inevitably ensue for her. In more benign situations, again under the guise of male authority, I believe women may experience sexual assault in the form of verbal harassment of which men may not be aware. I have heard reports of this kind of harassment from several women during bishops' interviews. These experiences may be very infrequent. I do not know. But if they are occurring at all, it is something that should be addressed in light of the disastrous effects on the women involved.

Men and women often hold strikingly differing perceptions. What a man may perceive as inspired use of authority, a woman may experience as sexual harassment. For example, a woman reported to me that in an interview that included a discussion of her sexuality, the bishop appeared to her to be "turned on." He seemed to find the conversation sexually stimulating. If she had confronted him on this point, he may have vehemently denied it for several reasons: one, because it wasn't true; two, because he didn't want to admit it; three, because he wasn't even aware of it in himself. In circumstances of this kind, there is, in reality, little opportunity for a woman to confront a male authority figure on this issue. It's a private situation so once again it would be "her word" against "his." The power relationship is vastly unequal from the outset, and as women, we have been taught that we must be obedient and submissive to Church authority, vested exclusively in males. It is difficult to imagine how, under these circumstances, a woman, particularly a teenage girl, could find the courage to put an end to something that she perceived to be sexual harassment. Thus, men persist in the belief that they are conscientiously fulfilling the duties of their calling while women continue to view the same situations with dread and anxiety and avoid them whenever possible.

Do we want the sexual assault on women to continue? The answer seems obvious. Yet, I believe it would be simplistic and inaccurate to assume that we can stop this behavior pattern unless we recognize that it is intimately connected with the dominant-submissive relationship that is fostered (some believe scripturally) between men and women. Men's sexual domination of women and their expression of it in whatever form they choose is symptomatic of the larger picture of their domination in every area of women's lives.

As I have attempted to illustrate, this is true for several reasons. First of all, because the male is dominant, he defines the sexual experience for all of us. Because he neither seeks nor attends to feedback from the subordinate female, he is easily able to delude himself into believing that he understands the experience accurately for both. Secondly, the female, already defined as subordinate, is unable to develop her full agency as an autonomous individual with understanding and awareness of her own needs. As such, she may not think of herself as other than an "object," a thing to be used at someone else's pleasure. Such a self-image begins early in life, fostered by the many and continuing admonitions that she take her place as "second" in the grand scheme of things.

Finally, and most tragically, the sexual domination of women circles back and accentuates male dominance in all areas through control and intimidation of our very souls. As in any dominant-submissive relationship, the dominant class must at some level exercise and maintain ascendancy and control through fear and intimidation. While this may not take place in individual relationships, the ruling class must show in

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Good Girl—Good Woman

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I always tried very hard to be a good girl—to do everything right. I wanted to be correct in my knowledge of church doctrine, policy, scripture, and history. And I sought to be right in my understanding of God—who He was and who I was in the eternal scheme of things. I always wanted to know my part so that I could play it well and be acceptable to Him.

I was taught by my father to use Church authority to check out the truth of things. When I went to him with a question, he often said, "Let's see what the brethren have to say," and then turned to one of the many Church books in our library. This process worked well for most things for quite awhile for me. But I remember some painful inquiries involving the roles of men and women. Not only have the words of the brethren on this topic and the scriptures shaped my feelings towards myself and God, but my experiences with men and women at home and at church have also had a powerful effect. And, unfortunately, my understanding of these things has left me feeling more wounded than empowered.

My father was a good Mormon man, an authoritarian and the leader in our home whenever he was present. He did not have a relationship of equality with my mother. He did not allow any challenge to his decisions, nor did she express her views when they differed with his. It seemed to me that Church tradition and teachings reinforced their unequal roles. He was to rule, and she and the children were to obey. But I saw that my mother suffered and that we children suffered, too, from the unquestionable authority in our home. And the cost to my father was relationships that were less than honest and open with his family because we were all too cautious or too angry to fully express ourselves with him.

My relationship with male authority at home and at Church left me feeling that women were less. It seemed that men were in authority because women were not capable. I remember when I was quite young my father expressing extreme annoyance at an author of a book that he liked very much. The author used initials instead of a first name, and my father couldn't reconcile himself to the possibility that the author was a woman. "Surely no man would use initials; only a woman would in an attempt to disguise her gender. But this book is altogether too good to have been written by a woman. A woman is just not capable of writing so well about important and interesting matters." I listened and believed every word. Women were not capable. As a woman, I needed to follow the authority of my father, the men in the Church, and my husband. I was always to consult with those in authority over me and yield my judgement to theirs.

*I could not trust myself
because I was a girl.*

When I prayed and felt that I had an answer, I always checked it out with "the brethren." If my prayerful understanding didn't agree with theirs, I rejected mine. I could not trust myself because I was a girl and didn't have the priesthood, that special connection to God. I felt that I wasn't as good as the boys. Whether I wasn't good enough because I didn't have the priesthood or wasn't intrinsically good enough to be given the priesthood, I couldn't determine, but all women seemed lesser for the lack of it.

When I was eleven, I had my first male teacher in

Sunday School. I felt so privileged to at last have a teacher who held the priesthood. I knew that he would be smarter and better and that he would teach really interesting, important, and true things. One Sunday he taught something that I thought was false. I was terribly upset. How could he teach the wrong thing? He had the priesthood. As soon as I could, I checked it out with my father who turned to one of his books to quote the authority. I was the one who was mistaken; my Sunday School teacher was correct. I felt embarrassed and

*I had clearly
created God
in the image of my
worst interpretation
of my own father.*

ashamed for having thought that I knew better than he.

In my heart, I sometimes felt that I was fully equal as a human being—fully lovable, smart, capable, worthy, deserving, equally esteemed by God. But most of the time, I feared that I was not, that that sort of affirmation couldn't be true for women. When I was a young teenager, I had a crush on Robert, a medical student in our ward. He was obviously bright and doing great stuff with his life, and he talked to me as if I were a real person. This was highly unusual for me—not just because I was a girl but also because I was only a freshman in high school and graduate students had always ignored me entirely. His speaking to me made me feel different about myself, and I began to think that maybe I could be like him—educated, contributing to life in a big way, participating fully in Church things, being smart and good and kind—a real and whole person in society, and valued for being so.

Then, he married Janie—a pretty woman who mostly giggled and smiled and rolled her eyes. In testimony meeting, she cried and said she didn't know why Robert had married her because, as she said, "I'm nobody." I felt shocked, like I'd been slapped in the face. How could someone as wonderful as Robert only want a pretty bubbly woman, a nobody? It seemed that women didn't need to be, or even shouldn't be, whole and equal and capable in a broader sense. Women were to be wives and mothers—to provide a limited and specific function to facilitate the more complete lives of men. I had let myself get carried away with the idea of a different, more meaningful possibility for my life that had intrigued and inspired me. The message I got was powerful: it wasn't Robert who could be a role model for me; it was his wife Janie that I had to look to.

I have been burdened with the idea that women are less, not only in the eyes of our American and Mormon cultures but also in the eyes of God. Irrevocably and eternally. I struggle with this. Something within me cries out, "No! You are equal, you are whole, you are fully good, you are fully esteemed by God." As good as that sounds, I still distrust myself. And when I check it out, with the words and actions of the brethren, the scriptures, the structure of the Church, and the relationships of men and women in Church history as well as today's Church and in the world around me, what I see everywhere tells me that I must be wrong, that women can't be equal. I go back and forth on this issue, and how I feel affects me physically as well as spiritually. When I am feeling unequal and less esteemed, I am sad and tired. When I am feeling perfectly good and whole and

esteemed, I am happy and full of energy.

I never liked the Old Testament God. He seemed cruel, unfair, unreasonable. I suspected that Old Testament leaders used "the fear of God" and "the will of God" to control their followers. I didn't want to believe God could really be like that. But a while ago, I looked hard at my own image of God and had to admit that my god was in the image of a mean man who didn't really care about me but who sometimes pretended to be good to me. I found that I disliked that god intensely, and I refused to be his any longer.

However, as I thought about this mean god image I realized that, at times, I saw my own father in the same way. He was very busy with work and Church and was not often home. When he was home, he was sometimes tired and irritable. I learned to be careful around him, to judge his moods, so as not to be too playful or outspoken, and thereby avoid his rebuke. His displeasure was hard for me to bear, all the more because I rarely felt I deserved it. My siblings were not as careful as I, and I also suffered at their hurt. He allowed no recourse or explanations, and he never apologized. His judgement was quick and final, and he was always right because his was the only point of view that mattered to him.

But my father was also fun and playful. He was kind and gentle and caring. When I was sick, I felt better when he took care of me. He used to hold my head, which made me feel that I would be all right. I felt protected and safe with him. As I grew older, we had many interesting discussions. When I was a grown woman and had become a feminist, the two of us went to the temple together. We talked the whole ten hours down on the bus, and went through nine sessions in two days, talking between each. He wanted to see it all through my eyes, to know my point of view. I knew he loved and respected me. I don't want to discount his goodness; yet, I realize that because of the hurts of my childhood, I sometimes saw him as "a mean man, who didn't really care about me, but who sometimes pretended to be good to me." I had clearly created God in

*This
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the image of my worst interpretation of my own father.

I have felt disempowered in my relationships with my father, Church authorities, God, and ultimately all men. I want that to change—and it is changing. There are times in my life, increasingly more frequent, when I feel fully good, whole, and complete. These times are full of joy and self expression. They feel more than good; they feel awesome. Sometimes I'm in touch with a perfect goodness within me that is deeply felt and real, unlike anyone else telling me that I'm good. This goodness in me feels both like Me and like God.

I continue to discover new possibilities for images of God and of women and men. Ones that don't feel painful. Ones that feel really great to this Good Woman.

This Is My Church, Too

Judy Dushku
Watertown, Massachusetts

I often think of a story told to me by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. She told it as an illustration about how we ourselves can and do create our own scriptures that we live by. We have an experience that teaches us a powerful truth, and we tell and retell the experience like a parable, as a way of reiterating a principle and etching it in our minds. Because of the example of the Biblical parables and because we have learned that real stories about everyday human beings—having experiences that illustrate sacred principles—give such principles vitality and give substance to our understanding, we come to love these stories and the truths that they carry to our hearts and souls. The story Laurel told is one she says has significantly affected her understanding of the Church and what it is and can be in our lives. I was tremendously helped in my own feelings about my relationship to the Church when I heard it, and I continue to pass it on to others who may find comforting wisdom in it.

The story goes that Laurel Thatcher's grandfather, Nathan Thatcher, was a farmer and a bishop in Thatcher, Idaho, when the son of Joe Pond, the president of Bishop Thatcher's stake, began putting a fence around some of Brother Thatcher's property. Bishop Thatcher protested to President Pond to no avail. The Thatchers had always been a devout and dedicated Mormon family, accepting callings and living happily within the community of the Saints in the Thatcher ward. Even during this difficult situation, they had no complaint against the Church or trouble living gospel principles, but they were angry about the usurping of land.

Bishop Thatcher went to the stake president. An argument, which grew into months of acrimonious debate and public displays of anger, ensued. People in the stake took sides, and some old friends of the Thatchers sided with the stake president and criticized the Thatchers for not supporting their Church leader. Other friends sided with the Thatchers and suggested they should just quit going to President Pond's stake. The stake president said that because he was the president of the stake, the Thatchers owed him more respect and must accept his decision about the fencing of the land.

general review of their state of well-being, that they are doing "OK" but that "they have a really 'bad' bishop right now and it is really taking a toll."

I know what that can mean. I have watched a number of friends' lives be burdened by the experience of having a "bad" bishop. Mostly, the stories are of women who have had five or so years with a bishop whom they describe as hating women, one who has blocked their every effort to serve with strength and inspiration, criticized their personalities, censored their words, humiliated them for acts of courage and service that the bishop decided were not in their assigned stewardship, and often denied them callings or the right to go to the temple. Men have these stories, too, and many have lived through years of angst for trying to stay close to the gospel, serving the Lord in the ways they feel are good and true to themselves, while being on the bishop's unacceptable list and made to suffer the pains of exclusion and ostracism.

Sometimes, a new bishop does the trick, and within weeks, the sweet experiences of being called to serve in a new calling, being welcomed warmly into the chapel after five years of the opposite, having a different tone in temple interviews, and being invited to speak or to pray, bring back the joy of church-going to a man or woman who had felt pushed out for some years. But, sometimes, when those years of being battered by a bishop's criticism are the same years when other problems are looming, recovery of the joys of church-going can come more slowly, or never. It is hard to hear stories of beloved friends who have left the Church or have become marginal in their participation—out of their own need to survive and protect their self-esteem and that of their families—and not share that anguish myself, not feel some bitterness towards the offending leader.

Yes, of course, I know all the stories about how it is the fault of those who are "too easily hurt" and who let a small thing like a bishop's insensitivity bruise them into a retreat from gospel participation. But, then, some of us have no idea how deeply hurt are these individuals and families who are cast out by a critical and unacceptable Church leader. It is tough. I have never quite had the experience, but I have been close. I have had to go to church week after week after having been labeled by a bishop as a "bad influence," an "undesirable." Because

challenging an official ostracism with the bold bearing of my testimony, a testimony that dares to survive the onslaught of a near-banning order. I tell myself it is at times like these that I most need to hear myself bear witness to my testimony of Jesus Christ, of my knowledge that I am in the right church, and that the Lord of all of us has a purpose for me in His plan for building the Kingdom of God on Earth. And so my message to myself is clear: *When I feel that my testimony is the least apt to be invited by others, that's when I need to bear it the most.* Is that not the lesson of my pioneer foremothers and forefathers who stood up for their beliefs in the face of deriders and oppressors?

So I do, and I stay. I am committed to remaining in the Church as long as I live. And, as an active member, I plan to do all that I can to strengthen my testimony, and when it feels strong, I will bear it, rather than sit quietly on the back row where some in my ward would wish me to shrink away to invisibility.

I have friends who have left, and I am filled with compassion and understanding for many of them whom I know were truly driven out by the unrighteous impulses of leaders who could not deal with the differences between them. And I will not judge their decision to leave in, as they say, a desperate act of self-protection and self-defense. But I will continue to try to make the Church a place that welcomes them back at any time. *It is part of my testimony that the Church is big enough for all of us and that the Lord welcomes into His kingdom even those pushed out by the less generous of spirit.*

Nearly twenty years ago, *Exponent II* invited to our "first annual" Exponent Day Dinner (a yearly event that we held for some years to celebrate Mormon women who had been examples to us), Juanita Brooks. That was a long time ago, and I had not yet personally lived through the tragedies in the lives of so many brothers and sisters in the Church who were to be damaged by decisions made by their leaders. But I somehow knew enough to be deeply touched by the story of her writing *Mountain Meadow Massacre*, many years earlier.

She had dared to write the truth about an event long hidden by Church leaders who had committed to whitewash a sad story in our history. She was approached by Church leaders from all levels and was told to withhold her story, to deny the evidence that her research had led her to expose. She refused and bore her testimony to the notion that truth was sacred and worth protecting and bearing to the world. She was disfellowshipped and for many years denied the right to partake of the sacrament or hold a calling in her ward. Oddly enough, she kept going to Church, often feeling, she recalled, lonely and despaired. But years passed, and although such wounds may never quite heal in this life, at last new leaders were called who changed the policies of her ward and the Church toward her. She was invited to participate fully. She was welcomed back into the community of the Saints, where she remained for the rest of her life.

What a story. And what better time to circulate it among our brothers and sisters who wonder where they should turn as some unrighteous leaders insult them, offering demeaning criticisms and innuendos that can have the power to crush the soul. As I hear stories of modern-day Juanita Brooks and Brother Thatchers, I want to record their parables and publish them to the Kingdom. *I have a testimony that the Lord is not behind these exclusions and bannings of our dedicated brothers and sisters. The Lord loves His children and longs for the day that petty narrowness ceases to guide our actions and that we are, instead, all guided by the generous spirit of love and acceptance of the wondrous variety of God's daughters and sons on this earth.* ■

*"This is not Joe Pond's church;
this is the Lord's church."*

When, during a stake meeting, President Pond summarily released Bishop Thatcher as bishop of his ward, Kenneth Thatcher (Laurel's father, then a little boy) said, "If this is the way they are going to treat people, I'm not going to church."

And herein lies the heart of the message of this parable. Laurel's grandfather turned to her father and said, "This is not Joe Pond's church; this is the Lord's church."

I am fifty years old, and I grew up in the Mormon Church. This fact has brought me great joy from time to time, and sadness at others. Often my sadness is for someone else that I know in the Church, and often it is over the issue of being out of sync with a bishop or some other Church leader. How often I have shared the despair of a man or a woman, during a more

it is so hard, there is always the temptation to quit—"at least until we get a new bishop."

But, for me, the story of Laurel's father has been a source of strength and inspiration. Sitting and feeling lonely in a Church meeting, knowing some people in the chapel resent my presence and my very self and wondering if we wouldn't all just be happier if I disappeared, is not a great feeling. Knowing that I have been intentionally "stripped of my callings" to make my uselessness in the official eyes of the ward leaders clear, makes at least the idea of a limited presence quite appealing. At times like these, I have intoned the words of Brother Thatcher to his son, as told to me by beloved Laurel: "This is not Joe Pond's church; this is the Lord's church."

At times like this, I have asked myself, "Should I bear my testimony?" Someone may be offended by my

Thoughts and Happenings

An Exponent II column dedicated to sharing your ideas for working with and for the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in new and positive ways.

I think this new column is the best idea I've heard in a long time. How constructive to help people know that they are (1) not alone and (2) that someone else is doing innovative things. Sounds like a great way to facilitate change . . . sharing information and increasing people's comfort zone.

Here are a few contributions from our Stake.

The stake Relief Society and Young Women's presidencies have been concerned about the young women who are not making it from the Young Women's program to Relief Society. In one of our wards, over the last ten years, only one of the Young Women graduates is still active in the Church. Realizing that there is a problem, but not assuming that they knew all the answers, they asked the female stake Young Single Adult leader, the singles ward Relief Society presidency, and the stake Relief Society and Young Women's presidencies to meet for a brain-storming session.

There was a brief discussion of the problem, which was recognized by all. There were many ideas shared of which I will mention a few.

All of the women felt that young women weren't required to develop themselves spiritually partially because they are not required to prepare for a mission or a priesthood calling. In the singles ward, the Church is able to keep young men coming for mission, temple, and Elder's Quorum preparation classes. As a result, that particular singles ward has a very strong Elder's Quorum while the Relief Society is sparse and the majority of women inactive. When these women are contacted, most find no reason to come to an organization in which they feel like there is no place for them unless they want to get married.

We thought it might be helpful if women were permitted to leave for missions at the same age as men do (19) and have the same cultural expectations that they will go that men have. Because socially there is no longer a stigma attached to dating younger men, the traditional excuse for sending women later in life is not applicable. Because most women are getting married later these days, it would be helpful to allow them to go on missions during their formative years before they get caught up in a career and/or school. A mission experience would require young women to develop themselves spiritually and would help them make a successful transition from teenager to adult.

Another connected problem is that young women don't feel a strong bond with the other, usually older, women in Relief Society. It is very difficult for them to go from the extremely nurturing environment of Young Women to an environment where they are often overlooked for more experienced women. Currently in our stake, the Young Women are visit taught by one of the members of the Young Women's presidency. We thought that part of the problem could potentially be solved by having a member of the Relief Society visit teach these young women in the last two years that they are in Young Women. We also discussed having two different Relief Society meetings each Sunday. The men don't all attend in one class and are generally divided by age because of how callings are given. The Elders are usually the young men in the ward and the High Priests, the older men. This separation provides a natural division that doesn't always but sometimes helps the teachers meet the needs of the various people. The women don't have a natural division provided in their structure; creating two classes would help give them a choice. We were thinking that it would be better to leave the decision on which class to go to up to the individuals so that a natural division would take place without hard feelings.

A third area that we discussed is the practice in our ward for Teachers (boys ages 14-16) reading a scripture in Sacrament meeting and then telling the ward what they think it means. This is done by pairs of boys-one reading, the other explaining. Although this is undoubtedly good for the boys, there is no similar high-profile, spiritual development required of the girls this age. We thought that it would be a good idea for the boys and girls to alternate Sundays or months. The argument in the past has been that the girls don't want to participate in this "opportunity," but the boys have not been given the choice. We felt that this sent a message to the girls that it wasn't as important for them to develop their spiritual gifts as it is for the boys, and that is not the message we want them to get.

—Contributed by Jennifer Rees
San Mateo, California

One stake in California encourages women leaders to work together to determine sisters' callings in their wards. The Relief Society, Primary, and Young Women's presidents meet once a month in a separate meeting to discuss women's callings. Their goal is to prayerfully consider, first, what's best for the individual woman; second, what's best for the ward; and third, what's best for the auxiliary, in that order of importance. These auxiliary presidents then propose to the bishopric a list of women who might receive particular callings. The bishopric makes callings based on those suggestions and the additional information and inspiration that they have. In most cases, the women leaders' suggestions are followed.

In the wards where this system has been implemented, a number of advantages have been noted. Improving the communication and coordination between these three critical auxiliary presidents can help prevent behind-the-scenes competition among the Primary, Relief Society, and Mutual for talented people. As a result, possible conflict among members of the bishopric responsible for staffing these different auxiliaries is minimized. Decisions about callings are also based on more information that takes the overall health of the ward into account—not just the immediate needs of the auxiliary.

—Contributed by Robin Z. Baker
Belmont, Massachusetts

In September of 1991, the president of the Relief Society in my ward asked me to have lunch with her. She said that several working women and others of menopausal age had approached her with the request for a meeting at least one Sunday a month where they could have open and honest discussions. They complained that they had heard all of the lessons and that they wanted something that would better suit their needs. Our ward has an especially large number of mother's helpers, and it makes it more difficult to have the kind of discussion that these women want. She asked me if I would lead these discussions. I accepted.

The following month, we held our first class. In my opening remarks, I told them about an experience that I had when I served in the Relief Society presidency during the late seventies. I was in charge of giving food assignments for an upcoming ward dinner. I approached the oldest lady in the ward (in her early 60s). I said, "Sister Orhn, would you please bring . . ." and I was promptly cut off. She said, "I've done all that; I've brought everything over the years, and now I just bring butter." I told our new discussion group that I couldn't relate to her then, but I certainly can now and perhaps we are all at the stage where we "just bring butter."

It stuck! Henceforth, we have been called the "Butter Club." We write it on our homemade letterhead. Even though anyone can attend, I think privately that we feel rather exclusive, like we have a membership in a country club. Although the majority of the women are 50+, there are three or four in their late 30s and early 40s who attend.

For discussion topics, I actually take the germ of an idea from the Relief Society manual and have great fun with it. For example, there was a lesson on honesty. Trust me the manual did not mention Paul Dunn, but his actions were a good part of our discussion. I often find appropriate articles in *The New York Times* that I copy for handouts. It is very clear that finally these women can speak up, without being uncomfortable or guarded. The discussions tend to be very contemporary—what's happening now. Really all one needs is a good thought-provoking questions; the "Butter Clubbers" are so thirsty to talk and explore ideas that they are off and running.

We have sisters from another ward that meets in our building who occasionally attend. Friends of mine in Florida, Georgia, Utah, and so forth want to start "Butter Clubs." If women were in charge, I think that we'd go Church-wide, but I believe that we'd be much too worrisome for the brethren to handle.

—Contributed by Corinne N. Wunderli
Stamford, Connecticut

Your contributions to this column are welcome. Please address your "Thoughts and Happenings" contributions to:

Robin Z. Baker
Exponent II
P.O. Box 37
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Second-hand Culture

(Dedicated to my husband)

I have a good wife
Who reads to me,
Insists I listen,
And reads with glee.

Refining stories—
Culture's her goal,
Great poems she's sure
Will feed my soul.

But if I seem glum
Or out of sorts,
Why can't she wait till
I've read the sports?

*Belle deJong VanWagenen
Provo, Utah*

On Gardening

Could I but be as stubborn
and resourceful as a weed—
I'm sure there is a message there—like
How to Succeed!

My garden grows such thriving,
advancing, robust gems—
The little seedlings that I plant
don't stand a chance with them.

We battle through the summer,
and on into the fall.
I think it's a great wonder
a tomato grows at all.

The vegetables have lost the race
before we can begin.
So if we brag on those that grow,
it surely is no sin!

For midst the summer's steaming heat,
this battle with the weeds
has left us humble, often cross,
and very tired, indeed!

*Harriet Rapson
Somerville, Massachusetts*

The Gathering An Idyl

I

They came, one before the other, seeing:
One near another, inclining to another,
Whispering and seeking: one thinks of colors
And the gems that hold them, grace them fully,
From the lightest bisque and golden sunstream,
Into Atlantis blue and the coventry of violet,
In the transept of arriving: they held
The winnowing together and full belief
In the shields of sun, full of color,
Jewel-like flowers on an emerald pond,
Not less than everything they knew,
Vocative and petalled: one they held
As one might hold a rose and their identity,
Raising her, one in all, in her suspiring,
As one suspires in prayer and its similitude.

II

If prayer were deeper still, it would be magenta
Bright in shards of petals in palisades
Of one's remembrance. But Elena was there,
Enduring the lightfall, brimming clusters
Of white around a centre. She touched them,
Variously touching them to hold them across
Their skiey Regulus. The glow was starry
In the fold of her being, as she transpires
In the light of a sepulchre.
The next spread rose amid florets of sun.
The lavender opened, broadly astream
In green, the emerald held the tricolor
In a cove, tassels surrounded pale pink
In dew; ah, sun in eglantine
Traipsing through diadems; I see them all
In the foundling witness of seeing them:
The Magdalene, Britomart, Guinevere, and distantly,
Isolde, rose in moonstone, in firelight,
The chrysolite, the harlequin, and purple
In that green into which they came and met,
Circling one, and then in amethyst, carnelian
As in the seal of faith.

III

In the convergence light, like a gardenia
Lifting the presence of dew,
She rose like a sacrament in a dell
Of gems that seem, that are. The air was fresh
With rain, and the light of evening was held
As moving memory, now.

IV

All is a gathering, all is gathering the merit of blessing.
The urgent hours slowly arising and brimming
Are a blessing. This immediacy sweeps away,
Becoming eternity. They look strangely at each other,
Wondering. Bluebells shake and tremble silently.
Quizzically they ask, "Was this the hour?" The Pleiades
Are just beyond the pale. The arising light defines
The past in the shade of her hand. The closing years
Rise in light and air. There, in the distant mere,
He comes again!

V

Holy Spirit! O wonder, you come in the tilting galaxy
Near your disciple, great Orion! The surge of light
Bequeaths us the hint of Bethlehem. The attending power
Cherishes you at your very birth in the centrifuge;
The vending spiral sways in the margin of infinity.

VI

One cannot fully know the eternal rose,
Though it is in the mind. But this is knowing
More, for the rose is of another too, and the extent
Is in time, the limitless. They are not the less,
Because its richness is the surge and flash of knowing
As well as dew! Immediacy is of the limitless,
Of the rich gardenia that is faith in the high-spun
Glow. O light that always was and is becoming,
The reaching forth and far always dispels what is not,
The failing pennant cloud, the great dissimulation.

VII

Your will is His, the fortune of the light. Held,
It now is of you, the aspect of the Virgin, the river
Of the flow in the high conception of the Lord:
Soul of the equation, the integer of beginning,
A cradling of petals of light and leaves
Amid the whispering and seeking.

*Clinton F. Larson
Provo, Utah*

*Poet's Note: This poem was written after
hearing a description of the 1990
Exponent II Reunion.*

Poet's Note: One afternoon at sacrament meeting, Helen and I, writing notes to each other (with the help of grown-up Cheerios—pencil and pen), discovered that we had both been in the kitchen watching ballet on TV the same evening. She had been making zucchini bread; I had been bottling pickles. We both wrote poems about the experience.

Dancing Through Pickles

Finally, although it is night,
I tackle our garden yield
of cucumbers and onions,
shiny, smooth, rain-fresh,
turn on kitchen TV
to see Baryshnikov and company.

Through busy-boiling mist
he spins, leaps like lightening,
stops gravity with *entrechets*.
Fluid ballerinas wave
like reeds in gentle wind.
Through the steam, I glimpse
pas de deux, divertissement.

I ladle bread and butter
pickles, colors of jade,
into Mason jars, trying
for a dancer's graceful curve
of arm, swirl rings on bottles
in a *pirouette* spin.

Dancers bow to applause,
arms full of flowers.
I take a curtain call too,
corps of jars in gossamer
greenly lined up beside me,
imagine roses' cool petals
in my arms where mustard seeds cling.

With hands smelling of onion,
I perform a *grande jeté*
from the kitchen, apron strings
flying, vinegar perfuming my hair.

Julie E. Barreau
Logan, Utah

Bottling Baryshnikov For Julia

Baryshnikov, athlete of God,
dances his sublime best
to a rude kitchen audience.
Over nightly ice cream and homework
they glance occasionally at the screen
flashing its Platonic perfection.
And I, bent on prudence, not *pliés*,
work inferior magic over yet another zucchini—
failing, myself, to glory in the art
I ache to know—
Sublimity wasted; zucchini saved.
My friend, yearning too,
does pickles through the *grande jetés* . . .

Helen B. Cannon
Logan, Utah

To the Mothers Who Bear No Names

Clasped in the bonds of the father, I
kneel to seal you, Mothers, to your children,
your endless families; wondering, each
time there is no name for you except
Mother, where in life your names allowed
the clothing of the female orders: daughter,
sister, wife, mother. In delivering

yourselves to the persuasion of blood and
relation, your names must have faded: veiled,
a bride. In mute labor, a mother.
Submissive, obedient, a wife. Now
I know you only as mother. My name
too has faded, four times laboring for
the names that clothed me in new habits

of blood and relation: primipara,
multipara, mother. Four times the children's
father circled the babe with his brothers
and mine, the child acceding to the rites
of the fathers, the blessings of names,
the burdens of the personal. In that
circle I have no name except Mother.

But in the anonymous exclusion
I find new place in a gathering
of nameless mothers. And in that place I
celebrate you, Mothers of generations,
who gave birth to me, to my sisters
and brothers. I chant for you the song of
women's names, I bless my daughters with

the blessings and the burdens of names:
Amelia, brave heart, Sophia the wise,
Abigail who brings joy. I say, Let
them be daughters, sisters, lovers, and
mothers, but first and always themselves,
female, eternal, the bearers of their
own single imperishable names.

Lisa Orme Bickmore
West Jordan, Utah

Vessel

Fluids, the chemists say,
Take the shape of their containers.
I must be the inverse of a fluid.
The child inside me is growing, and I
Take the shape of what I contain.

Bulging like a grocery sack full of cans,
Or a two-year-old's pockets, stretching the seams.
Protuberances ripple across my belly,
I feel like a cloud, distended with rain,
Roiling and swaying across the sky,

Overdue, overripe, I expand.
My head is full of images of bursting:
Fermenting coconuts gushing out milk,
Fomenting thoughts exploding into tears.
A nuclear warhead, about to achieve critical mass.

Addie Lacoe
Los Angeles, California

West Bloomfield Township 1979

Grey sky and water merge
till sunrise paints them apart
with the shadow of a heron

Deb Butler
Arlington, Massachusetts

Editor's Note: The following "micro-stories" are the third of a four-part series of twelve stories written by Penny Allen, all being published under the title "Shards."

SHARDS

Penny Allen
Bountiful, Utah

The Men Babs Went Out With

In the midst of a description of his latest project for IBM, one he'd worked on at his Acapulco home during the winter, his hand's tremor causing a constant tiny tide in the glass he held, Victor slammed it down. Wine sloshed on the tablecloth. "Waiter! he called, then again, "Waiter!" though they could see the man was taking an order. "The glass is dirty!" he exclaimed as if he had been personally insulted. Babs saw everybody staring at them as the waiter apologetically removed the glass. Now Victor's voice rose to a hysterical pitch, "Take everything off and start over! Take the tablecloth, everything!"

Ashore in Carmel-by-the-Sea after a stormy day on a fishing boat, the faint nausea she'd had since the deck surged under her feet began to abate. Babs stood for half an hour by a pay phone while Cecil called his bookie about his racing bets. At least the pavement didn't move. She was cold and hungry, but they were not to eat because they had to rush back to San Jose so he could join a group going bear hunting in Alaska, a last-minute opening.

His reddish hair sweeping his shoulders, Jules gestured to a modern assemblage involving computer terminals geometrically arranged, each displaying a different part of the body in action. "Very imaginative," he purred. "In my apartment in the City (he referred to San Francisco), I have just one of his terminal displays, an eye. Very provocative." Before he sat down in his Jaguar, he carefully pleted the back of his pants to keep the creases fresh. "You've quite taken my fancy, Babs. It's seldom I take a woman out nowadays, so many of my friends take me. I'm spoiled. They even send a post-date note of thanks as well." "Well, Whoop-de-do," said Babs under her breath. "Screw you."

After the second date, Chandra Chandarasingh, 32, handsome, a bachelor, had dispensed with the scraggly beard and turban. He didn't seem taken aback when he met Leon and Angela, even though they were covered with dust from biking down the dirt pile out back. He had a M.S. in Math from an Indian university and managed a "Burger King." He thought the San Jose water was turning his hair grey. "It wasn't grey before I came to this country," he smiled. Then, "Where would you like to go this weekend? Maybe this time we could include the children."

She backed out of the junk yard, grateful for the new fender, even if it was green and her old Mustang was yellow. At least it wasn't crumpled and rusting. Besides, Woodworth had installed it for her at cost. His old Camaro had at least five different-colored parts on it. He promised that someday when he painted it, he'd paint hers, too. That was the most he'd promised in the five years she'd been seeing him. However, he was down to drinking .5% beer and said he really was reading the Book of Mormon.

Burning Bright

"I heard more screaming last night," Mother said, a heightened tremor in her veined hand. "You didn't hear screaming, Mother. Maybe some teenager's tires peeling rubber or cats courting."

"I heard it. And I saw the body in the gutter when we drove to the mall."

"Road kill, Mother. I don't look at it."

"Road kill with its stomach ripped out and great gashes on its arms? It was a young boy with red shorts."

"Mother! They wouldn't let a child's body lie in the gutter! Use your head, for crying out loud!"

"I tell you, it's out there, but they just don't put it on the news because they don't want to panic anyone."

"Don't be silly. We don't live in a jungle. We live in a decent community where we turn on our porch lights at night and edge our lawns."

"Do you know what they do to people? Do you? It's like a male cat catching a kitten. First, it blinds it. Then, it disembowels it and leaves it to die. People who drop their unwanted kittens out of cars to get rid of them ought to know what happens to them."

"All right! That was a long time ago."

We hoped it would find a home."

"Futile wishing. It reminds me of the ancient Greeks. They'd abandon malformed or female infants in clay jars on the mountainside, comforting themselves with the wish that a bereaved queen would come and rescue the baby for her own before the foxes tore it up."

"Mother, you are so morbid. Have faith. We say family prayers every morning and night."

She snorted. "Soft prayers. And I see you locking the doors at night. But, stalking us on the rooftops, it will blind us in our beds."

A Blessing and a Name

He had trembled so in taking the baby from her that it seemed as if the priesthood holders surrounding him were supporting him as well as the baby as he gave a "father's blessing." Yet the naming after her great-grandmother Susannah and the prayer he had uttered had fulfilled expectations of the occasion with honors.

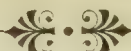
He had longed for his first child to be a boy but had presented the two-month-old girl, almost hidden by the lace of the family blessing dress, with a joyful face. He had blessed her with physical, mental, and spiritual strength. He had outlined the life they hoped she would lead: growing up faithful to the Church, baptism, continuing in chastity and virtue, then being married in the temple to a worthy young man. He had honored the women closest to him by blessing Susannah's life to follow the pattern of their lives.

After everybody was gone, they had listened to the portable tape recording she had made. She had told him how grateful she was for his worthiness, his priesthood, his inspiring prayer.

Now, during the 2:00 A.M. nursing, she felt the tremendous weight of her responsibility as a mother, her all-encompassing importance to this helplessness, her inability to expect that her daughter's life would follow the blessing's design as a matter of course as her life had. For she was aware that she was a dinosaur in a world where most girls were not virgins at marriage—if they married at all, in an age when motherhood and wifehood were not the principle occupations of most women, when two of three women could expect to be single for a very large portion of their lives.

Filled with wonder, she gazed at eyelashes, fingernailed hands, the perspiration of sucking so hungrily. If she could add an informal blessing, one just between the two of them and God, she would bless Susannah not to be afraid to ask for anything from God to help her stride His path confidently. She would bless her daughter to achieve all she was able without fear of becoming too smart or accomplished. Let Susannah aspire to marriage but be prepared with enough self-esteem and earning ability to cope with being single. Now the words emerged in a whisper as a vision shone before her mind. "I bless you to see yourself as a queen and priestess in training, worthy and worthwhile." She felt a shiver of fear at the uncertainty of it all, yet fixed her hope in the prayers that would be continually a part of her daughter's life.

She placed Susannah, asleep, on her shoulder. If only she could tell her how much more there was for her than all the world's voices would shout! "What I would bless you with most of all is to have a baby girl of your own." She spoke into the tiny, whorled ear, "And the name you shall be known by on the record of my heart is *Seed of Galaxies*."



Ten Acres and Hovering

Emma Lou Thayne
Salt Lake City, Utah

When I was fifty, a sixty-year-old told me a story that I thought had taught me much. But only this month, as I'm turning sixty-eight, I had to learn it all over again. I think using current jargon I should label that lesson "Co-dependent No More." And it applies to lots more than addiction.

The story, probably added upon:

The Lord gave everyone ten acres to be responsible for, to till or let lie fallow, to tend or allow to be infested with weeds, to plant and water or not, to harvest or sell off. For more than fifty years, however, she had supposed that she was also responsible for those ten acres given to her husband and children—fifty acres in addition to her own. It was not easy, all that being in charge. Then one day, she remembered the bargain with the Lord about agency. She started worrying about only her ten acres, knowing that sometimes hers would adjoin or intersect and maybe need to share water or seed with one of the others, maybe once in a great while, with all of them. And sometimes there would be flood or drought, and resources would need to be pooled. But as she began to turn her acres into the lovely garden she'd always known that she could grow, she had more to give, and the others turned theirs into crops and beauty that she never could have imagined. She was there to encourage, consult, admire, or console, to help during emergencies, and even more, to help share the goods when each had finished working whatever each thought each garden deserved. And if one neglected an acre or two, it was all right. Nobody had to be perfect for anyone else. Especially her. And her days became manageable, her nights free of the terror of not being enough. As the Lord knew, everybody was enough, and so were ten acres.

A month ago, I had to learn again the truth of that story. Another version. My own.

At 9:12 A.M. on a Thursday in September, my husband had what, by all appearances, was a stroke. Speech slurred, right side weak, arm and leg uncontrollable. Scary. A call to 911. Paramedics, ambulance, emergency. For a whole day, way scary. Two more episodes, one diminishing only to have another start. Tests. CATScan, MRI. A tiny clot must have broken loose in one of the vessels leading to his head. A blessing given him by a brother, sons-in-law. Daughters close. Finally, a blood thinner. Now everything back, his "stroke" declared a TIA—Transient Ischemic Attack. Only a warning, they say. A week in the hospital to assure rightness of thinner, switch from IV to pills, then home. Good. Great. Restored. Back to himself, wanting to climb on the roof to shut off the swamp cooler or drive to San Diego "to get away for a bit."

So what did I become? A hoverer. To make sure he was all right. After all, I sort of liked this sweet man, forty-three years my husband. So, I took care: No foods with vitamin K that clots blood. No stress. Plenty of rest. Blood thinner checked every week. Even a beeper, offered by my physical therapist son-in-law, programmed to new numbers so that the dearer-than-ever husband could find me no matter where or what, especially at my studio only seven minutes away but with no phone (until now, a luxury!). He insisted none of it necessary; he was fine. But no, I had to be sure. By hovering.

One afternoon, a chance to play golf in Park City, thirty-five minutes away. Friend June and I had tried all summer to go. On the way, a beep. To a phone. No, he hadn't tried to get me. To the golf course. On the sixth hole, far out, three beeps loud, siren loud. Tear to the clubhouse, pulling my bag. Call. No answer on either line. Panic. Into my car, speed home. And there he sat, at his desk.

"Why are you home?"

"Didn't you beep me?"

"No, I went to lunch with your brothers and then to the Fairgrounds to do some business."

A call to the paging company. Must have given me wrong numbers. Enough.

Hovering is for the birds. But it took being ridiculous to find out. I'd planned for months to have October in my friends' empty condo at Sun Valley to write a big project on deadline. Had paced myself toward the quiet, the chance for one-directional doing, being. But now? Certainly not. My whole life and sense of caring, training now screaming, "No. Hover." Despite that, more sensible, he'd said ever since the recovery, "Go—it's important." Doctors, family, everyone the same "Go, it's important."

And so, uneasily, I did. And it is important. And he's fine, just fine. Gardening, turning off the swamp cooler, at the office some—though retired, letters, calls to and from me, going to dinner at his daughters' tables, tending his grandchildren, seeing movies, even a trip, mostly driving, but a trip. A time to do it all his way. Feeling whole, fully cared about, and newly able.

And me? Whole, too. In touch, aware of home, but doing my work, walking in the splendid fall, being sustained by the ineffable, and anything but hovering. And us? So much better for my letting him be better—on his own. As I am. As I hope we can remember to let ourselves and each other be. Until the next time we fly together, with no one hovering for more than a time in Emergency. Looked over by a God not hovering but in tune. With our starting to become what heaven must have intended: Ourselves. Durable. Peaceable. Connected. Never ungenerous. Ready for whatever sirens might call in the night. ■

Not to Hover: Co-dependent No More (In W.S. Merwin's shadows of trees)

Well, she must make up her mind not to try to be everywhere because why.
When they were little she became a shadow over them.
After all they were hers weren't they because she was told so.
Because what they became should be shadows of her shadow.
Wasn't that as the great shadow intended as it got bigger with its voices and files
And fell between all of them and the sun.
The sun after all needed screening to keep
Its light shadowed or eyes would go blind, wouldn't they.
And so with the ambulance sirening and him
Shrinking inside his shadow of words and functions
Her shadow would grow because why not.
Until it could hover everywhere to be sure.
But how could it stay so. Unless
It started to swallow the other shadows, theirs, his
As hers would be swallowed by the great shadow and they all would vanish.

Well the sun found her after the night
And she pulled her shadow away and stayed with it.
And the sun came from behind the great shadow.
And even the sticks and stones were clear.
She needed then only to be somewhere well, the others too, and him why not.
With his words and intentions returning well to his shadow unshadowed.
None of them, especially her, got lost.
And they went on growing the lucky ones
With their shadows and why not the sun.

Going Overboard: The Giving Dilemma

Kathryn Dawson Brannon
Columbus, Ohio



I love helping others. That's why I'm in the counseling business. But when does giving become giving too much?

I first faced this dilemma in a concrete form as I began in my counseling career. The six-year-old boy across my desk had been referred for his depression. He had the backwoods, pinched-face look of many of our center's clients. He looked gaunt; yet, his clothes were too small for him. After gathering information about his home life from the social workers, I could see why he was depressed: alcoholic father, extreme poverty, and consistent verbal and physical abuse.

Throughout the session, he maintained a high, tough-guy attitude. He admitted beating up other first-grade kids and claimed that he could "whop" anybody who dared cross him. Finally, I asked him a standard question that I use for the first "getting acquainted" session: "Could he name one sad thing that had happened at his house lately." He sat for a moment, as if the question hadn't penetrated. Then his face crumpled. "I can't hardly talk about it 'cause it makes me cry," he said through his tears.

I gathered him in my arms, and that's when I realized—I was going to adopt this child. If adoption wasn't possible, I would kidnap him. He shouldn't have to live such a wretched life. I could give him the love that he needed.

It's been a year since that incident. I didn't adopt the boy, nor kidnap him.

I did, however, meet another child, a teenage girl this time, who had been molested and was very mixed up. She told me that she wished I could be her mother. I did not take her home either.

Whether we are professional counselors or sisters in the Church, there seems to be a need within us as women to try to fix all the problems in the world. We're taught that "when ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God." We're counseled to "love thy neighbor" and to do "it unto one of the least of these . . ." But the concept of giving is not as straightforward as it seems.

When I first took the job as a family counselor at the alcohol and drug rehabilitation center, I was replacing a young woman who had been dismissed somewhat against her will. Jill (a pseudonym) had gone overboard as a counselor, I was told. She walked clients home after sessions. If they had no transportation, she took them to K-Mart to do shopping. She attended their volleyball games. She gave them her home phone number and told them to feel free to call her any time, day or night. Jill had no family and never dated; she didn't have time.

The coordinators of the center were blunt. "You are not to be another Jill." Several of Jill's former clients stopped coming to see me because I did not subscribe to Jill's generous method of counseling; however, I have been very grateful for the directive from my bosses.

The Lord was generous when He was handing out blessings in my direction. I grew up in a middle-class home, with parents who adored me and who spanked me one time that I remember and with siblings who applauded my accomplishments. Education was "next to Godliness" in our home; so, everybody there has or is working on advanced degrees. I also take seriously the directive that where

"much is given much is required." And I enjoy giving because I feel that I have something constructive to contribute.

If I love to give and others love to receive, why is there any dilemma? The reason is the need for moderation, without which giving and receiving become tangled.

Mental health professionals are offered seminars that deal with job burnout. Job burnout, for us, is simply another term for the dilemma of giving, including determining when to help, when to withhold assistance, how to deal with a client committing suicide when the very act of suicide seems to indicate that one didn't help enough, and what to do when there doesn't appear to be anything to do to help a wretched person improve his or her life.

As Latter-day Saints, as mothers, and as neighbors, we don't receive seminars on the art of moderate giving. We need them, but perhaps no one wants to address this issue because giving is the essence of Christianity. If we question aspects of giving, we may appear selfish; however, there seem to be four general principles about giving that we should all consider.

First, we cannot help the whole world.

Perhaps some of you saw Goldie Hawn play a defense attorney in the movie *Seems Like Old Times*. Her basic strategy to get her clients lighter sentences was to hire them to work for her. Her kitchen help, maids, gardeners, and chauffeurs had all been clients. The result was chaos. The movie humorously and gently reminded me that I, too, could be swept up in the desire to personally make everybody's life just fine.

Thousands of worthwhile charities could use our money. None of us has enough to donate to each of them. What we can do is choose one of them, or a few at the most.

Several families in our communities or wards could use our assistance. We do not have enough time to help them all. What do we do? We choose.

The Savior's mission was to save the world. None of us has received such a tremendous calling. We are to emulate the Savior, but not even He was able to temporally help everyone. He could only perform miracles for a relatively few.

We are not going to be able to help everyone in need either; however, we can do our part. That's why it's called "our part." None of us could possibly do the whole.

Second, we each have a finite amount to give before we need to receive. My sister was feeling down one day as she thought about another student at school. This other woman had several volunteer jobs that she performed after classes each day, making her seem like a young Mother Teresa. "I don't do anything like that," Jennifer said, dejectedly. I reviewed the facts with her. Was this girl currently going through marital distress, as my sister was? No. Was she supporting herself by working in a hospital one hundred miles away? No. Did she belong to any totally volunteer church organization? The answer again was no.

We all have the capacity to give, but it is a limited capacity. We have to be rejuvenated to be able to give again. Even the Savior tried to get away occasionally to pray in peace, to rejuvenate himself.

We cannot gauge how much others have been nourished, and therefore, we shouldn't judge when they seem to give unceasingly.

Motherhood is an area where many of us are in danger of going beyond our finite abilities to give. Two-year-olds with middle-of-the-night ear infections and older children needing sequins sewn on school costumes at midnight make heavy demands on our reserves. As mothers, we need to limit the giving we do for those outside our families. We must also remember our need to refill our vessels.

With my two children, I have developed a balance of giving and receiving that I feel works well for me. But if I had another baby, I would have to adjust and change that balance.

Third, there are many types of giving. There is the giving of one's time, one's talents, or one's money. There is the giving of emotional energies. There is the giving of those things that are abundant in our lives, as opposed to the giving of those things that mean great sacrifices for us. There is the giving that we do spontaneously and the giving that is done when we are prompted, even urged. There is the giving that other people know about and the giving that goes on unnoticed.

It seems necessary to differentiate the kinds of giving because many times we are made to feel guilty for not giving enough in one area. Someone may feel put out when we are unable to give in a certain way. If we compare ourselves to others who do give in this way, we run the risk of belittling ourselves by not considering the many other ways in which we do give.

Relief Society has, at times, been a mecca for this type of guilt. Not long ago, I went to a church restroom between classes and heard a sister crying in one of the stalls. When she was able to dry her eyes, she said, "I always feel like I'm not doing enough. Everyone else seems to be giving more than I am." I was astounded at her strong reaction to that week's Relief Society lesson. This woman had four children and was working full-time as a nurse to put her husband through pre-med, just so he could graduate and ~~she could continue~~ working to put him through medical school. I got tired just thinking about her schedule. She was one of the most giving women I knew, and I worried that she was giving more than she was taking in.

Just as there are many types of giving, there are different types of givers. It is easy for me to give hugs; it is difficult for me to initiate lunches with friends. It's a matter of personality. Because it often taxes us to do some things more than others, we should never compare our tallies with those of other women.

Fourth, sometimes we hurt people if we give too much. My brother Jeff tells a mission story about when he was on a crowded street in Haiti. A heckler motioned toward Jeff and said in Creole, "If you are such a Christian, why don't you give me ten dollars?" Jeff, a much quicker thinker than I, replied, "Why don't you show me in the Bible where it is that Jesus gave people money?"

Many of us, whether due to our gender, our Church upbringing, or whatever, are quick to jump in where we think our help is needed. I have benefited countless times when Relief Society sisters have come to my rescue with transportation, encouragement, food, even clothing for my children. I would never suggest that sisters squelch this desire to give to others. I would, however, caution us to make sure that we are helping, not hurting, with our gifts.

I often work with wives of alcoholics. The most difficult and important concept that I try to explain to each is that she is doing her husband a great disservice by being too giving. She must learn to refuse to make excuses to her husband's employer when he has a hangover. If he begs for ten dollars of the grocery money, she must not give it to him. If his behavior is totally unacceptable, she must be prepared to leave him and to stay away unless and until he makes a sincere effort to change.

Most of these women probably think I am heartless and perhaps even an atheist; doesn't "The Good Book" say to be forgiving? What they don't realize is that their giving prevents these men from growing up. Alcoholics are little better than professional beggars who deliberately look debili-

tated so that charitable people will continue to support them. They can continue to be dishonest and unreliable if someone is always there to bail them out.

Sometimes, when we start out helping others, our actions are beneficial. Then, somewhere along the way, a person can begin to rely too much on us instead of on herself. It's a subtle problem. To avoid it, we need to develop a policy of giving and then stepping back to monitor the results.

Nowhere is this problem demonstrated more in my life than in my role as a mother. I may start out waking up the kids every day for school, a noble endeavor, then find out when they're in the fifth grade that most of my children's peers are now expected to wake up on their own. At this point, I should probably buy them alarm clocks; otherwise,

they may get to college and miss a lot of early morning classes.

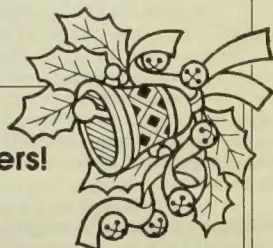
No one is perfect at monitoring their giving. Sometimes I give too much, sometimes I'm too stingy, and occasionally I amaze myself by getting it right.

The giver can also be hurt by too much giving. We need to ask certain questions of ourselves to determine whether our current level of giving is detrimental to us: (1) Do I devote enough time to my primary responsibilities? (2) Am I becoming physically ill because of my giving? (3) Am I becoming emotionally drained? (4) Do I feel resentful about my giving?

It may seem unnatural to scrutinize the art of giving so carefully. Can't we just give? Looking at Christ's example once again, we find that Jesus

incident retold in the New Testament. To some people, He gave advice; to others, food; to others, His fury. To some individuals, He gave a word-for-word procedure; to others, He gave parables to make them think more.

There is only one who can give perfectly. As a counselor, I can help others to some extent, but there is another Counselor who stands at the door ready to give in ways I will never be able to give. Perhaps my ultimate mission is to teach others how to knock on His door. ■



Who Said Christmas Is for Children? Christmas Is for Mothers!

Dawn Thurston
Villa Park, California

For many mothers, Christmas is a burden, anticipated with about as much joy as tax season. I know I sound a tad negative. I admit it.

I didn't always feel this way. I can still remember the euphoria I felt as a girl when Christmas just magically happened. Nothing else quite matched it. For a girl, growing up means taking responsibility for the "happening" part.

These thoughts come to mind because in October my kids rented the movie *Christmas Vacation*. Guess they wanted to jump start their mom's Christmas preparations. I thought the movie was hilarious when I saw it the first time a couple of years ago. I laughed at the antics of Chevy Chase, Father Christmas personified, who staple-gunned himself to the roof trying to treat his family to an unforgettable Christmas. And he did. Part of the movie's humor lay in the absurdity of seeing a father fretting over the myriad details of Christmas preparation. The movie would have been far less funny—but admittedly more true to life—had it chronicled the Christmas preparations of Chevy's wife.

Am I not right? I bet there aren't many of you out there who have a Chevy Chase-type squirrel away under your roof. Oh, there may be a few exceptions. There are those men who, good with a jigsaw, cut out those adorable wooden sleighs and reindeer, creating yard displays that draw parades of onlookers from all over the county. How would it be?

My husband is no Chevy Chase. In the exciting first years of our marriage, however, he was eager to take on the Christmas assignments typically set aside for fathers. You know: tacking the lights on the outside of the house; putting the tree in the stand. The novelty wore off after a few years though.

He was let off the hook after the great Christmas tree debacle. Our oldest son was five years old. That was the time the tree that I had hauled home turned out to be too large for our flimsy metal tree stand. You can just picture the kids standing around, excitement in their eyes, waiting for the tree to be lifted in place. Imagine their disappointment when they were hustled off to bed so they wouldn't witness the tension, the exasperation, and the cursing that occurred as their dad hacked away at the tree trunk with his hatchet. Thank heaven for the artificial tree that saved our family's repeating of that scenario.

Out of fairness now, I should tell you that my husband is not a complete washout during the holidays. He takes one responsibility very seriously—shopping for just the right gift for me. He is generous, and he has wonderful taste. Envious sales clerks have asked me how I landed him. He makes me feel like a child again on Christmas morning when I view for the first time a festive

array of presents that he's purchased just for me, all beautifully wrapped by a kind store clerk. I really shouldn't complain.

Sometimes though, as I drag through the mall for the thirty-eighth time during the month of December trying to decide which items to buy for my four children (and for their school, piano, and Primary teachers), special neighbors, close friends, parents, brothers, sisters, their spouses on both sides of the family, and my husband (and his secretary), I'd gladly forego my own gifts in exchange for a little more help.

As long as I'm warming to my subject, husbands aren't the only slackers. There are also the kids. I still remember those early years when they were so eager to be in on everything—decorating the tree; making cookies; putting stamps on the Christmas cards. My kids are now teenagers. Do you think I can get them away from their activities, even if it's just a TV commercial, to put a little tinsel on the tree? Even for tradition's sake? Mine have been known to beg off because they remember helping me last year.

I know I am not alone. I've talked to enough exasperated women to know that there are many of you out there who share my experience. One woman told me about the time that she was kneeling on her bedroom floor late one Christmas Eve wrapping last-minute presents. Her husband lay spread-eagle across the bed on his stomach watching her. He mumbled, "Would you like some help?" Even though he fell asleep shortly after this offer, my friend felt gratified that he sensed, even for a moment, that he might be needed.

Then there's my mother-in-law. She has twenty-nine grandchildren and a limited Christmas budget. Each year, she worries herself into a stew over buying just the right gift for each grandchild. Last Christmas, I suggested that she forego the annual stress and buy one nice gift for each family. That wouldn't do. She wanted each grandchild to know that she had picked out something especially for him or her. Her motives are laudable in this day of catalog shopping. When I hinted that she might invoke the assistance of my retired father-in-law, she replied scornfully, "Oh, if he had it his way, he's just give everyone a check."

Why do we keep on doing it? Because our mothers did it. Because no one else will if we won't. Because, despite all the progressiveness of our generation, women are primarily the caretakers of children. And Christmas is for children, after all.

Setting aside all these motives, altruistic and otherwise, there is another motive we should consider. Get ready. WE LIKE IT. Admit it. Do you ever see men nosing around in those cinnamon-scented Christmas boutiques? How many males have you noticed flipping through Christmas idea magazines while waiting at the checkout stand? Can you imagine a man sacrificing even an hour's sleep nightly from now until December so he can pull off a Christ-

mas that will rival the one in the *Martha Stewart Christmas Book*? Let's get real!

Face it. Women will always heft the biggest load at Christmas. If we accept that fact, we can also take the responsibility for lightening that load. For example, I'm sure that we all know ways to make Christmas less stressful. But, are we willing to do them? Some of us get so entrenched in doing things the way we've always done them that we find it better to go through a few months of emotional and physical wear-and-tear for the satisfaction of knowing that we gave it all we had. But if, like me, you'd like to see things done a little differently next year, you might consider some of the following suggestions.

First, let's make a few changes in our basic approach. If you typically take the shotgun method to Christmas preparation, scattering your thoughts and energies in a dozen different directions, try sitting down and making a list of priorities. What really means the most to you and your family each Christmas? Your task list and time allotment should flow from your answers to this question.

Steel yourself from getting bogged down with low-priority projects. Sometimes we fuss and fritter away our good nature on tasks that really mean little to our families. Chances are your children won't mind if they never have a personalized needlepoint stocking. I can't imagine my brood becoming annoyed because my silk poinsettias aren't tipped in just the right way.

Next, make Christmas planning a subject for a family home evening. Don't assume it's martyr time again. Ask family members to sign up for various assignments. If the family understands that without their help these tasks just won't get done this year, you may have some volunteers. If not, well—they just won't get done.

Be tough now, and stick to your guns. Don't be like my hair stylist. After recounting the grim details of the Christmas dinner that she had prepared and cleaned up while hubby and guests visited in the next room, she vowed that she would streamline this year by investing in some holiday paper goods. When I commended her for her hard-line approach, she admitted sheepishly that by January her resolve had weakened when she took advantage of a sale on some pretty Christmas china. Hers is the kind of weakness that gets us into trouble.

One final suggestion! Once you've pared down your task list and done some delegating, don't give yourself the guilts for not providing your family with all your usual frills. It's not worth it. Regard the changes as a necessity for your Christmas enjoyment. And, enjoy yourself. Christmas is for mothers, too! ■

Sisters Help & Sisters Speak

Safety First

Judy Dushku
Watertown, Massachusetts

Last week, I went to the temple for the first time, after years of avoiding what I expected to be a distressing experience. To my surprise and delight, I was not distressed. In fact, I found the experience a pleasant and affirming adventure, made sweeter by the fact that I went with my ward and was greeted warmly with outstretched arms by forty sisters and brothers as I finished my spiritual trip. I did not feel exhausted, as I had expected I would, and the weird part for me is that I found that fact strange and startling. As I have tried to honestly and carefully explain this feeling of "nonburdenedness," I have been unhappy to acknowledge that, in all honesty, I have come to expect that any place I go where there are bound to be large numbers of Mormon men, I expect to feel heavy, burdened, and in some actual physical pain from being there. I can't yet put my finger on what this is related to in my lifetime as an active Mormon, but the contrast between how I felt at the temple—which I must have assumed would be the same as any other place where Mormons are gathered—and any other Mormon mixing place, such as chapels, picnics, and conferences, is astonishing to me.

I did have other ideological reasons for avoiding the temple, and I have managed to keep some easy-to-cite reason for not having a recommend. But in reality, I just did not want another place in my life that felt like a place where I would feel hurt. When I finally decided this fall to go to the temple, I felt brave, but I know now that I expected, unconsciously, to feel battered by the experience. Although there were many precious things about my first temple experience, as I reflect on it from my one-week perspective, I am still most struck by my memories of feeling safe. What a sweet relief.

Two summers ago, I took my soon-to-be husband, Jim—who had taken me home to meet his family in Iowa—to Nauvoo to introduce him to the history of my Mormon people. I love LDS history and the Doctrine and Covenants, and I had spoken warmly of Nauvoo and some of the stories about its past. We arrived rested and joyful, with my daughter Eliza eager to see the little buildings and learn about the things that happened there. There was no reason for sadness or heaviness. We stopped for lemonade on the way into town, laughing and feeling happy. But when we entered the Visitor's Center and were greeted by several mature LDS men with badges bearing names with the familiar middle initial configuration, I began to feel claustrophobic and fearful. I suggested that we go outside. Eliza and Jim urged me to stay so that they could look around, and I felt guilty for not encouraging my non-member, near-husband to see the films and exhibits.

I gave in, and we stayed a long time. I was genuinely interested in the artifacts and stories because I love them. I was glad to be there with Jim and Eliza because I love them. But, I was overwhelmed by an all-too-familiar feeling of "achiness" and "burdenedness" that I now realize I had come to associate with the places Mormons gather. I don't seem to feel it if I am planning to be with Mormon women, but I have come to expect it when I expect Mormon men.

Jim was sensitive to my reaction and confused. We spoke of it that afternoon and occasionally later, but we have not yet figured out the cause or an explanation. I have, however, become more aware of others who share my experience.

I often say my goodbyes in the parking lot after church to women who ask if I am as exhausted as they are. We have laughed and attributed our exhaustion to lugging kids, having organizational responsibilities, whatever. But my kids are older now; they either come or they don't on their own energy, and I often have a calling that frees me from any Sunday responsibilities. I love seeing and talking to people I love. Taking the sacrament is a sweet pleasure, and I usually love hearing testimonies and talks and enjoying the insights that they give me into people I want to know better. But the feeling that I have been in a boxing ring, with a champion fighter, is often the one that I carry to the parking lot. Naps are not part of my daily routine; however, I expect that I will need a nap right after church. Eight hours at work on a weekday is nothing for me compared to a three-hour Sunday church service. What can it be? And why did I not feel this way in the temple?

I do not know. I have mentioned this to five or so friends this week as they have called to inquire about my temple experience. Three of them reacted wildly. Yes, they got what I was saying, big time. Of course they felt the same way after going to church; one said that she could not remember feeling very different at the temple and that she would return to check that out. I told another long-time member friend, who like me had managed to avoid going to the temple, that I could not guarantee the safety of the place for her but that for me it had been a refuge.

Why? I want to know. I feel a kind of compulsion because that kind of safety is so energizing and empowering. I have tried to explain all of this to some of the men with whom I went. Most of them aren't sure they get it. One does; he says *safety* isn't his word, but *unburdened* is. He feels guilty and heavy in church, always, and has decided that a huge part of his faith in the Lord is that the Lord knows who finds it easy and who finds it enormously difficult just to show up on Sunday and will someday judge our attendance and support for meetings accordingly. This friend must consciously fight off all kinds of exhausting fears and pressures to get himself into the car on Sundays, but it is his lifelong habit to show up. None of those lectures on good habits and righteous patterns help. He finds going to church a heavy responsibility and says that he always leaves in a state

something akin to grief. He understood.

I recently learned a new and useful concept from a manfiend who is in recovery from childhood sexual abuse in which his mother was the perpetrator. In talking about his progress and about the ways that his life has changed positively since he had begun his therapy, he spoke of the "body memories" that he had used to lead him to a mental memory of what had happened to him as a child in his mother's arms. He spoke of how he had always been nearly overcome with physical aching when he visited his mother's home, usually back and stomach pain that was severe enough that he had to take pain killers.

Because of the pain that accompanied these visits, he dreaded and avoided them as often as he could, feeling guilty when he refused invitations to Thanksgiving and other special events and when he encouraged his wife to do the same after they were married. He had thought that perhaps all people had these mother-family, home-connected pains and had often joked about them assuming everyone meant the same thing by their references to the agonies of visiting mother.

Finally, his wife said that she thought that his pain was excessive and that he needed help. Because he had his own reasons for believing that this was so, he sought help and made amazing self-discoveries. His is an almost unbelievably uncluttered story of remembering his abuse by back-tracing from his current pain, confronting his mother—who, after six months of denial, acknowledged all—and then beginning a process of reconciliation and recovery. He is now pain-free and visits her regularly with a sense of safety in her presence and in her home. The deep body pain that alerted him to some real childhood pain is gone.

I can't quite get his story from my mind; it seems related to my feelings about Church gatherings and Mormon men. I recently married for the second time, and both times I chose a non-Mormon man. I have known many LDS men and have never seemed to be able to love or trust them as I have non-members. I do not believe that I was ever physically harmed or beaten or battered by a Mormon man, but something in my life as a Mormon has led me to experience aching pain in events and places where we are taught to expect to find peace. I feel that I must find some answers. Maybe in the calm of my newfound haven, the temple, some insights will come. Maybe I can find other LDS people whose stories will enlighten me. Do you have any?

Please respond to this "Sisters Help/Sisters Speak" request by April 30, 1993. If you use an IBM-compatible computer, please send the file on a disk with the printed manuscript to "Sisters Help/Sisters Speak," Exponent II, Box 37, Arlington, MA 02174. The issue topic for Volume 17, No. 4 is *Acquaintance Rape*. Please send essays by April 30, 1993, also.

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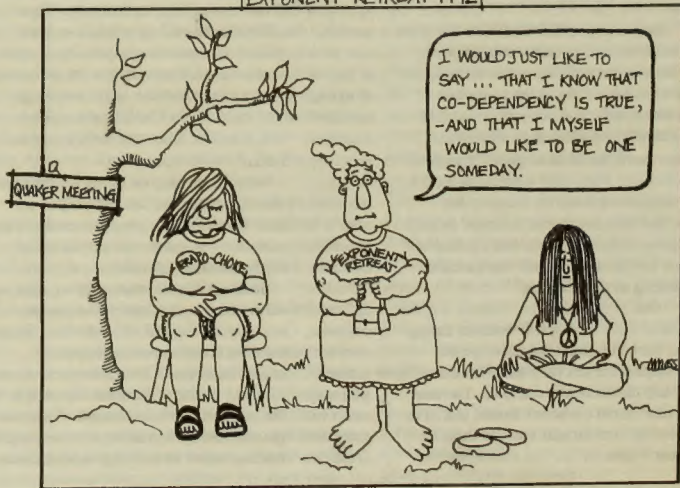
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EXPONENT RETREAT 1992

Melanie Moss



... Bay Area Task Force on Women

Called by a Bay Area stake president and attended by sixteen Mormon women from the same area in California in July 1991, this Task Force meeting was enthusiastically received by those who were invited, although there was a great deal of curiosity as to why they were being asked the following questions (a copy of which they had been sent prior to the meeting) and what would be done with the information. The women represented all age groups and were not chosen because of any special involvement in the Relief Society. In fact, several of the women had not attended Relief Society in as many as fifteen years because of their involvement with the other auxiliaries of the Church. These women commented that while they value the opportunity for service in these other organizations, they also feel a loss in their lives of more in-depth gospel study, of hearing shared experiences in living the gospel, and of developing friendships among the sisters.

The questions the women came prepared to answer were:

1. What do you see as the role of women in the Church?
2. Does this role cause you any feelings of burden or guilt?
3. Does Relief Society assist you in this role and motivate you to live the gospel more fully?
4. What recommendations would you like to see made to the stake president regarding the role of women in the Church?
5. How would you like to see the Relief Society program changed in order to more fully meet your needs?

While they attempted to proceed systematically through these questions, comments seemed to go back and forth because of their inter-relatedness. Although the meeting lasted two hours, there didn't seem to be enough time to thoroughly address each issue that arose; therefore, rather than take the time to write these notes up in a report that might misinterpret in some way the overall comments, significant comments are included here without interpretation.

• From society's viewpoint, our role seems lessened if we are just "homemakers." Young mothers feel pressured to be doing other things. They feel compelled to outdo other women outside of the Church in something even if it is just creativity. Sister Jack spoke recently about "self-imposed" pressures, but these are direct pressures from neighbors, PTA mothers, passers-by in grocery stores, and so forth who see LDS women as women with a lot of children who do not work outside the home to help support those children.

• The local norm in the Bay Area is different than the Church norm. Most wives work; the children go to day care. [Editor's Note: *We believe that this is also the Church norm.*] We need to feel more comfortable with the choices that we have made. Local economic pressures make women feel pressured to help out even if their husbands don't want them to.

• Women's roles should be as effective counselors in their families and in the Church. Sometimes women feel like they are not being listened to and that they are given lesser roles than those of the men. An example was given of a ward in which the leaders of the ward were called together for input on calling a new bishop in order to give some names to the stake presidency. Many key ward leaders were invited to the meeting, but no women were invited. Women feel good when their opinions are solicited and their comments are valued just as much as other individuals.

• Self-esteem is still a big problem among many women. Many women realize that they cannot rely on others to make them happy but are periodically still affected by a loss of self-esteem. The "stick of the priesthood" when wielded unjustly is devastating even to "strong" women, let alone the weaker women.

• A good bishopric can give appropriate support. It is good that there are now more priesthood lessons on developing family relationships. Unfortunately, the men who really need to hear them are many times the ones who are absent, just as the women who need to hear similar lessons from Relief Society are absent also.

• Relief Society lessons are geared many

times to young mothers although a good number of the sisters are not in that stage of life. Ironically, many young mothers are syphoned into the other auxiliaries and do not benefit from these lessons either. Young mothers who don't work outside their homes would benefit from weekday meetings to promote sisterhood and fellowship. Child care during this time is a problem.

• During Relief Society classes, it is hard to express true feelings or struggles because too many stereotyped images are stressed. Teaching needs to be more effective. Classes should not be lecture halls. More group sharing and participation needs to be encouraged. More training or in-service opportunities should exist for teachers to learn how to be more effective teachers. The lessons are vanilla when what we need is chocolate fudge. Teachers often feel insecure when giving lessons; this insecurity makes for "stale" lessons.

• Perhaps we could divide the group by their interests and have some lessons geared to those interests. In the past, the Relief Society's role was to be more of a place to find a support group. The meetings were held during the day and evening during the week. Meetings were more relaxed and "fun" before the block plan. The block program has created less time for this kind of socialization and more of a formal atmosphere because the meetings are held on Sunday. The block program is diminishing Relief Society attendance.

• Women are the workhorses of the Church; the men tell us what to do, after they get ideas from us. The more active the man, the more interested he is in his wife's Church activities. The less active the man, the more the opposite is true.

• The purpose of Relief Society cannot be achieved if no one comes to hear it. The sisters are overbooked and over-scheduled. Fitting another meeting into the week like the "Homemaking" meeting during an evening just adds to that feeling. The purpose and role of women is to help their sisters and everyone else to return to Heavenly Father. Ultimately, however, our main responsibility is for ourselves because we cannot force anyone else to change his or her behavior. We can, however, be an influence. Lessons should reiterate this.

• Sometimes we strive so much for perfection that we don't want to speak up and say that we are having struggles that would actually bring us closer together. The doctrine itself is not a burden, but the interpretation of it by others for ourselves becomes a burden that we feel we can never measure up to. We are all at differing stages of spirituality and development.

• Everyone in the ward needs the strength that comes from the Relief Society as a whole. Women can bring a kind of spiritual strength into the ward and their own families. Women also need the kind of moral support that comes from friendships among the sisters in addition to the relationships that they have with their husbands. Sometimes, we are not as sensitive to the needs of other women as we could be, especially when we are unaware of those needs.

• There is a dichotomy in living the gospel. We feel a need to be obedient, but we also feel a need to express our individuality. Obedience seems to place a restriction on individuality. We need to be more flexible in our thinking. We approach living the gospel in many different ways within certain bounds. To quote Sister Jack, "There are no typical LDS women anymore." We need to be less judgmental, more charitable and Christ-like in our attitudes towards others. We also need to be able to ignore social standing and categorizing the "haves" and the "have nots" and stop trying to be so much like the "haves."

• Perhaps Relief Society presidents could recognize the needs of groups of sisters as well as individuals so that special activities could be devised; however, the women in attendance at this meeting did not want to see Relief Society divided by age group on a regular basis. Strength also comes from a diversity of experience. There should be more of a sharing of experiences among the women. Women need to learn more about how to work with women; we can often be very critical of each other. Visiting teaching allows us an opportunity to interact with one another on a more personal level; however, assignments should be rotated at least once a year so that we get to know more people.

• Sometimes we work so hard to support the missing sheep or inactives that the stalwarts get ignored, taken for granted, and overworked—eventually leading them to fall by the wayside. Another thing that we are battling is apathy; perhaps we need more good

public relations to promote Relief Society.

• A few of the sisters commented that they had been involved in either Primary of Young Women for the past ten years and had not had the opportunity to attend Relief Society for that long. They said that they missed the opportunity to interact with the other sisters and to be spiritually fed. They wished that their callings could have been rotated more often, allowing them to come to Relief Society more often.

The Task Force agreed on making the following recommendations to the stake president:

1. We all need to be enthusiastic and promote Relief Society more.
2. We need to feel like the time at Relief Society is well spent and to value what we get out of it.
3. The lessons need to be made more interesting; everyone misses the cultural refinement lessons.
4. More self-esteem needs to be developed among women in the Church.
5. There should be more opportunities for service.
6. Women should take more time for themselves—to try not to over-stretch and over-commit.
7. Bishops need to be aware of not overburdening the same individuals and families repeatedly because of the shrinking ward population.
8. Wives should be consulted regarding their husbands' callings just as husbands are consulted regarding their wives'. It is either a partnership or it is not.
9. Women's callings should be regarded as important as the men's. Callings should not be made in passing in the hall.
10. Bishops and other male leaders need to be trained on how to work equally as well with both sexes.
11. Decisions regarding Relief Society, as with all areas of the Church, should be made with prayer.
12. We need to be accepting of all our sisters. We need to work on our Christ-like attitudes.
13. There needs to be more unstructured time at our Relief Society meetings and other meetings so that we can talk more with one another and develop relationships. Women need to talk and share feelings, frustrations, successes, and experiences.
14. There need to be more special lessons taught by knowledgeable people brought in, as in the past.
15. Perhaps there should be fewer lessons at homemaking dinner nights; we could just have dinner and time for socializing.
16. The brethren need to develop good listening skills and habits.
17. They also need to better understand the special talents and skills of the sisters and make more use of those talents and skills.
18. Women want to be heard and understood, and not dismissed or ignored.
19. We need to find a way to foster more tolerance of people, opinions, and differing ways.
20. We need to stress to bishops that all men need to support their wives in their callings and in the management of the family. It is not all of the women's responsibility all of the time.
21. Women need to hear what is being told to the men that sometimes occurs in priesthood meetings and doesn't trickle out. Sometimes, things get distorted this way.
22. Single women do not hear about priesthood socials and become even more isolated in the ward from getting to know people.
23. The women in the stake would like a chance to know the stake president better.
24. The women on the Task Force thought it was a very positive thing that the stake president wanted to hear their thoughts.
25. There is a need for special support groups for women and others in the wards, such as for people with serious illnesses and for community social services.
26. We need to dwell more on what we are doing right (without getting carried away) rather than on our weaknesses and laments.
27. We need to express our love and genuine support for each other like is done in the Young Women and in the Primary.
28. Relief Society leaders and bishoprics need to be aware of how long women are serving in the auxiliaries and rotate them more often so that they have a chance to recharge their batteries.

(Continued on page 20.)

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

... Bay Area Task Force on Women

(Continued from page 19.)

29. Relief Society needs to continue to keep in touch with women in the auxiliaries and perhaps do more for them and with them.
30. Presidencies of organizations and bishoprics need to know the sisters better before they call them to positions and spend more time in the interview process getting to know them and their current situation, their special skills and interests, and their past service record.
31. Relief Society lessons need to have more in-depth spiritual orientation or impact. Some sisters go to Institute to get further insight into the gospel rather than Relief Society or Sunday School. Why should they need to, when it could be available every Sunday?
32. There needs to be better in-service and better teaching.
33. Bishoprics need more training before they embark on the technicalities of running the ward. For example, people should not be stopped in the hall to be asked to take callings, as if being called to a Church position is not an important thing.
34. There needs to be more socialization and interaction within the stake and between wards. In the past, there used to be stake barbecues.

Overall, this seemed to be the tip of the iceberg of issues that women would like to address. We felt that a few more meetings like this might be useful in uncovering other areas, developing solutions and recommendations, and perhaps getting the insights of other sisters in the stake besides this group. The overall effect was viewed as very positive and helped to reinforce the idea that the Church is interested in people's ideas as to how to become even more effective in helping us to live the gospel. ■

... Announcement

The Case Reports Committee of the Mormon Alliance invites contacts from individuals who feel that they have experienced ecclesiastical or spiritual abuse within the context of the LDS Church or who know about the experiences of others.

The Mormon Alliance is a new organization to identify, document, and address such problems. Spiritual abuse or injury occurs in a religious system when individuals act without adequate accountability, using position, "special" status, or presumed special understandings of the gospel in ways that violate the agency, injure the spiritual growth, coerce the compliance, damage the self-esteem, and/or demean the dignity of others, whether leaders or members.

The Case Reports Committee invites contact both from those who feel that they have suffered spiritual abuse and also from those who feel that their ecclesiastical leaders have acted nurturatively and protectively in situations where abuse or injury was a possibility. We invite both leaders and members to report their experiences.

We are not interested in Church-bashing. Our goals as a committee are: to listen nonjudgmentally and confidentially (We realize that simply being able to talk will be an important step for some people.); to document accurately and responsibly the events that occurred, from multiple perspectives wherever possible; to prepare selected cases for publication; to promote healing and reconciliation; to help restore faith in God's love and the Savior's unfailing grace; to heal breaches of trust within the Mormon community.

Please telephone or write to:

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Salt Lake City, Utah 84121

... BYU Women's Conference

Karen Farb Tullis
Natick, Massachusetts

On February 6, 1993, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that a few weeks before the planning committee for this year's BYU Women's Conference had chosen Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and a recent recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, to be the conference's keynote speaker. According to the article, the Board of Trustees denied the request.

As the article indicated, the Board of Trustees sees Women's Conferences as being in a "unique position" and, therefore, invests more effort in controlling the speaker choices than it does the day-to-day activities of BYU. The Board of Trustees consists of the First Presidency, seven apostles, the Church Commissioner of Education, and the presidents of both the Relief Society and the Young Women's Organization. The two women members of the Board, Elaine Jack, and Jeannette Hales, were reported to be out of town when the Board made its decision. We encourage you to write to Sisters Jack and Hales at 50 North Temple, SLC, UT 84150, with your reactions.

The Women's Conference has certainly missed an opportunity to hear from one of the Church's finest members. Having disregarded her as a voice and role model for Mormon women—and a model of accomplishment for all Saints—the Board of Trustees has done a disservice to the women whom they had hoped to serve.

... from the Mormon Electronic Mail Network

David Anderson
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

One of the most striking images conveyed in last September's General Women's Meeting came in the second sentence of the first talk when Sister Aileen Clyde of the Relief Society General Presidency said: "It is good to have President Hinckley, and President Monson, and President Hunter, and our other priesthood leaders with us tonight to symbolize the priesthood partnership we so value in our Church and in our homes."

Sister Clyde was speaking on behalf of many women in the Church who have come to appreciate that their husbands treat them as full and equal partners. But the reality of how this partnership operates in the Church is brought into sharp focus when one reads how this sentence has been rendered in the *Ensign's* conference report: "It is good to have President Hinckley, President Monson, President Hunter, and other priesthood leaders with us tonight."

This action makes it all the more painfully clear that as a people we need to prayerfully contemplate the other powerful image in Sister Clyde's talk, that of "a culture hostile to the leadership of women."

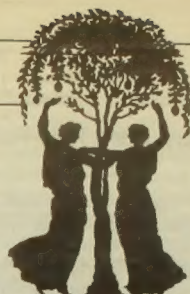
Unequal Power and the Sexual Domination of Women

(Continued from page 8.)

a multitude of ways that they are more powerful. I believe that sexual assault serves this function in male-female relationships. It states that our most intimate, most personal possession—our sexuality—is not ours to control. An employer, a classmate, a total stranger can comment at will about our sexuality, our appearance, our potential as a sexual partner, without our consent. He can, in fact, go further and "use" sexuality, again without our consent. This communicates to us at the deepest level of our souls that we are powerless, "nothing," of no consequence in a man's world. The destructive force of this message on women's lives is staggering to contemplate.

The Church teaches us that women as well as men are children of God. If this is so, then it follows that the Church should be a leader in advocacy for women. It should foster and facilitate our development as autonomous individuals, interdependent yet independent, able to protect ourselves if need be. It should encourage our development as righteous leaders, joining in full partnership with our brothers in Christ, to define, govern, and serve in the world as it exists for all of us.

Dr. Toronto is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has written and lectured professionally in the area of the development of women's gender identity.



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